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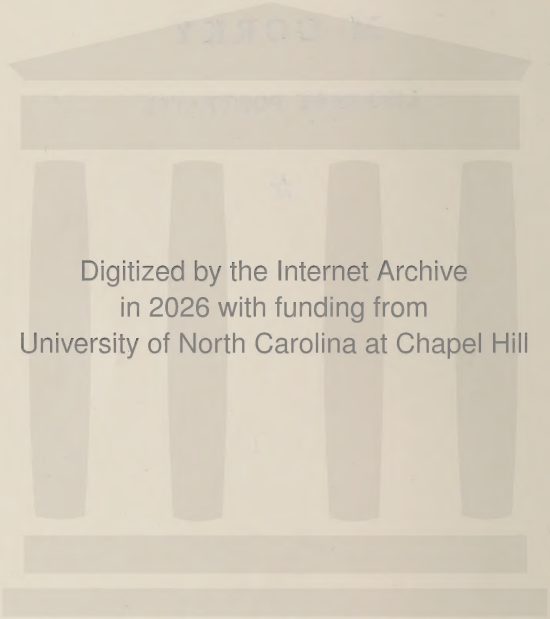
LITERARY PORTRAITS



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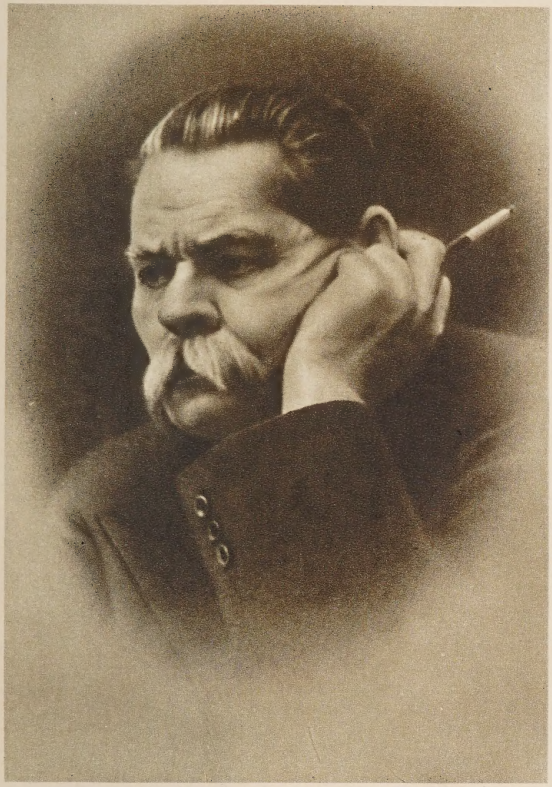

М. Горький

М. ГОРЬКИЙ

ЛИТЕРАТУРНЫЕ ПОРТРЕТЫ

ИЗДАТЕЛЬСТВО ЛИТЕРАТУРЫ
НА ИНОСТРАННЫХ ЯЗЫКАХ
Москва

M. GORKY

LITERARY PORTRAITS

FOREIGN LANGUAGES
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TRANSLATED FROM THE RUSSIAN BY

IVY LITVINOV

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LEV TOLSTOI

This book is composed of random notes made by me when living in Oleiz. Lev Tolstoi then being in Gaspra, at first seriously ill, later recuperating from his illness. I considered these notes, jotted down carelessly on all sorts of scraps of paper, as lost, but lately discovered some of them. I have included also an unfinished letter written by me under the impression of Tolstoi's "departure" from Yasnaya Polyana, and his death. I give the letter exactly as it was written, without altering a word. And I have not finished it, for I cannot....

NOTES

1

CLEARLY THE IDEA that destroys his peace of mind more frequently than any other, is the idea of God. Sometimes this seems to be not an idea, but a tense resistance to something

by which he feels he is dominated. He does not speak about it as much as he would like to, but thinks about it continually. I don't think this is a sign of age, or due to a presentiment of death, more likely it comes from a fine human pride. A little from a sense of injury, too, perhaps—that he, Lev Tolstoi, must shamefully submit to the will of some streptococcus. If he were a naturalist, he would undoubtedly have created brilliant hypotheses, made great discoveries.

2

His hands are marvellous—ugly, disfigured by swollen veins, and yet extraordinarily expressive, full of creative force. Probably Leonardo da Vinci had hands like that. Anything could be done by such hands. Sometimes, when talking, he moves his fingers, gradually flexing and unflexing them, while uttering some splendid weighty word. He is like a god, not a Sabaoth, or a god from Olympus, but like some Russian god, "seated on a throne of maple wood, beneath a golden lime-tree," and though he may not be so very majestic, perhaps he is more cunning than all the other gods together.

3

He has an almost feminine tenderness for Sulerzhitsky. For Chekhov he has a paternal affection, the pride of the creator may be felt in this love, but his feeling for Suler is tenderness, unceasing interest, and an admiration which never seems to weary the wizard. There may be something a little absurd in this feeling, like the love of an old maid for her parrot, her pug, or her puss. Suler is like some wondrous free bird from a strange, unknown land. A hundred such people as he would be capable of changing the face and the soul of some provincial town. Its face they would shatter, its soul they would imbue with a passion for restless, defiant genius. It is easy and pleasant to love Suler, and when I see how women neglect him, I am astonished and furious. But perhaps there is cleverly concealed caution beneath this neglect. There is no depending on Suler. What will he be up to tomorrow? Perhaps he'll throw a bomb, or join a choir of tavern singers. There is enough energy in him for three eras. He has so much of the fire of life in him that he seems to sweat sparks, like a red-hot iron.

But once he was very angry with Suler—Leopold (Sulerzhitsky), always inclined to anarchy, was fond of arguing hotly about the freedom of the individual, and L. N. (Tolstoi) always made fun of him when he did this.

I remember Sulerzhitsky once got hold of a slender pamphlet by Prince Kropotkin and, roused to enthusiasm by it, held forth the whole day to all and sundry on the wisdom of anarchy, philosophizing in the most excruciating manner.

"Oh, stop it, Lyovushka, I'm tired of it!" said L. N. crossly. "You're like a parrot: repeating the one word—freedom, freedom, and what does it really mean? Supposing you were to get freedom in your sense of the word, as you conceive it—what would be the result? Philosophically speaking—a bottomless void, while in life, in practice, you would become an idler, a mendicant.

"If you were free according to your conception, what would there be to bind you to life, to human beings? Look—the birds are free, but they build nests. You would not go in for building a nest, you would just satisfy your sexual instincts wherever you found yourself, like a tom-cat. Only think seriously for a moment and you will see, you will feel, that in the ultimate

sense of the word freedom is a void, a vacuum, mere formless space."

Knitting his brows angrily, he paused for a moment and added more gently:

"Christ was free, and so was Buddha, and they both took on themselves the sins of the world, voluntarily entered the prison of earthly life. And nobody has ever gone further than that—nobody! You and I—what have we done? We all seek freedom from our duty to our neighbour, although it is precisely this sense of duty which has made human beings of us, and but for this sense of duty we should live like the animals. . . ."

He chuckled.

"And yet we are now arguing about how to live nobly. Not much comes from this, but at the same time not a little. Look! You argue with me till you are black in the face, but you don't strike me, you don't even swear at me. If you really felt yourself to be free, you would slaughter me—that's all."

And after another pause, he added:

"Freedom—that would mean that everything and everyone agreed with me, but then I would no longer exist, for we are only conscious of ourselves in conflict and opposition."

4

Goldenweiser played Chopin, drawing the following thoughts from Lev Nikolayevich:

"Some German princeling said: 'If you would have slaves, you must compose as much music as possible.' This is a just reflection, a faithful observation—music dulls the mind. No one understands this so well as the Catholics—our spiritual fathers could never reconcile themselves to Mendelssohn in the church, of course. A Tula priest assured me that Christ himself was not a Jew, although he was the son of a Hebrew god and his mother was a Hebrew woman. He admitted this, but nevertheless declared: 'It is impossible.' 'What then?' I asked him. He shrugged his shoulders and said: 'This is a mystery to me.'"

5

"If anyone was an intellectual, it was Prince Vladimirko of Galich. As long ago as the 12th century he was daring enough to say: 'The time for miracles has passed.' Since then six hundred years have elapsed, and the intellectuals keep on assuring one another: 'There are no miracles.' But the people believe in miracles just as they used to in the 12th century."

L. N. Tolstoi and A. M. Gorky

Yasnaya Polyana, 1900

6

"The minority need God because they have everything else, the majority, because they have nothing."

Or rather I would say: the majority believe in God out of cowardice, and only the few from fulness of soul.*

"Do you like Hans Andersen's fairy tales?" he asked thoughtfully. "I did not understand them when they were published in Marko Vovchok's translation, but ten years later I picked up the book and read them again, and suddenly I realized quite clearly that Hans Andersen was a lonely man. Very lonely. I know nothing about his life. He was a confirmed rake and wanderer, I believe, but that only strengthens my conviction that he was a lonely man. And therefore he turned to the children, believing (but this was an error) that children have more compassion for others than grown-ups have. Children pity no one, they don't know what pity means."

* To avoid misinterpretation I would state that I regard religious writings as purely literary; the lives of Buddha, Christ, Mahomet, as imaginative fiction.

7

He advised me to read the Buddhist Catechism. There is always something sentimental in the way he talks about Christ and Buddhism—there is neither enthusiasm nor pathos in his words, not a single spark of the heart's fire. I think he considers Christ naive, worthy of pity, and though he admires him in some ways, it is unlikely that he loves him. And he seems to be afraid that if Christ were to come to a Russian village the girls would laugh at him.

8

Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, who seems to be a clever man, was there today. His bearing is modest, and he does not say much. He has nice eyes and a good figure. His gestures are restrained. L. N. smiled at him, talking sometimes in French, sometimes in English. In Russian he said:

"Karamzin wrote for the tsar, Solovyov wrote lengthily and tediously, and Klyuchevsky wrote for his own pleasure. He was a deep one, at first you think he is praising, but when you look deeper, you realize he is cursing."

Someone mentioned Zabelin.

"Very nice. A kind of petty official. A lover of antiques, he collects everything, indiscriminately. He describes food as if he had never had enough to eat. But he's very, very amusing."

9

He reminds one of those pilgrims, who pace the earth, their staves in their hands, their whole lives, covering thousands of miles from monastery to monastery, from shrine to shrine, terribly homeless, alien to everyone and everything. The world is not for them—nor God, either. They pray to Him from habit, but in their secret hearts they hate Him: why does He drive them over the world, to the ends of the earth—why? They regard human beings as mere stumps, roots, stones lying in the road—one stumbles over them, and sometimes hurts oneself against them. One could do without them, but it is sometimes pleasant to astonish people by one's unlikeness to them, to flaunt one's disagreement with them.

10

"Frederick the Great said a clever thing: 'Everyone must save his soul *à sa façon*.' And it was he who said: 'Think what you like, but obey.'

Dying, he admitted: 'I am weary of ruling slaves.' The so-called great are always extremely self-contradictory. This is forgiven them, along with all sorts of other follies. But after all, to contradict oneself is not folly: a fool is stubborn, but never contradicts himself. Yes, Frederick was a queer man—the Germans regarded him as their best emperor, and yet he could not bear them, he did not even like Goethe and Wieland. . . ."

11

"Romanticism is the fear of looking truth in the eyes," he said last night, speaking of Balmont's poems. Suler did not agree with him, and read some of them with great feeling, lisping in his agitation.

"That's not poetry, Lyovushka, it's charlatanism, nonsense, mere senseless word-spinning. Poetry is artless. When Fet wrote:

What I will sing, I know not,
But my song will swell within me,

he expressed the true feeling of the people about poetry. The peasant, too, knows not what he sings; he just sings oh! and ah! and ai-da-mi!

and out comes a true song, straight from the soul, as the birds sing. Your new poets do nothing but invent. You know there are idiotic things called *'articles de Paris,'* and that's what your poetasters are busy making. Nekrasov did nothing but invent his doggerel."

"What about Béranger?" asked Suler.

"Béranger's different. What have we and the French in common? They are hedonists—the life of the soul is not so important for them as the life of the flesh. The most important thing for a Frenchman is woman. They are a worn-out, bedraggled nation. The doctors say all consumptives are sensualists."

Suler started arguing with his usual outspokenness, spluttering out a multitude of words at random. L. N. looked at him, and said, smiling broadly:

"Today you're as peevish as a young lady ripe for marriage, when there's no suitor in sight. . . ."

12

His illness has dried him up, has burned up something within him, and he seems to have become lighter, more transparent, more adapted

to life, inwardly. His eyes have become keener, his glance more penetrating. He listens attentively and seems to be remembering something long forgotten, or waiting confidently for something new, hitherto unknown. At Yasnaya Polyana he had appeared to me like a man who knew all there was to know, who had found answers to all his questions.

13

If he were a fish his home would certainly be the ocean, he would never swim in inland seas, still less in rivers. A roach is darting around; what he says cannot interest it, it does not need it, and his silence does not frighten it or affect it in any way. And he knows how to be silent very imposingly and ably, like a real hermit. True, he speaks a great deal on the subjects that obsess him, but one feels there is still more that he does not say. There are things he cannot say to anybody. He probably has thoughts which he fears.

14

Someone sent him an amusing version of the story of the boy baptized by Christ. He read the

story to Suler and Chekhov with great gusto—read it wonderfully! He was particularly amused by the way the imps tormented the landowners, and there was something in this which I did not quite like. He is incapable of insincerity, but if this is sincere, so much the worse.

Then he said:

"Look how well the peasants tell stories. Everything simple, few words, and lots of feeling. True wisdom is always laconical—like 'Lord have mercy upon us.'"

But it is a ferocious story.

15

His interest in me is ethnographical. For him I am a member of a tribe of which he knows very little—nothing more.

16

I read him my story *The Bull*. He laughed a great deal and praised me for knowing "the tricks of language."

"But you don't know how to use words, all your peasants express themselves very grandly,

In real life peasants speak stupidly, awkwardly, at first you can't tell what they're trying to say. That's done on purpose, the desire to lead the other man on is always concealed beneath the apparent stupidity of their words. A true peasant never shows what's on his mind straight away, that wouldn't suit him. He knows people approach a stupid person simply and guilelessly, and that's just what he wants. You stand revealed before him, he sees all your weak spots at once. He is mistrustful, he is afraid to tell his secret thoughts even to his wife. But in your stories everything is straightforward, there is a collection of wiseacres in every story. And they speak in epigrams, that's not right, either—epigrams do not suit the Russian language."

"And what about proverbs, sayings?"

"That's different. They weren't invented the day before yesterday."

"You yourself often speak in epigrams."

"Never! And then you try to embellish everything—people and nature, especially people. Leskov did, too, he was high-flown and affected, people have long stopped reading him. Don't give in to anyone, don't be afraid of anyone—then you'll be all right. . . ."

17

I was struck by a strange saying in the diary he gave me to read: "God is my desire."

When I returned it to him today, I asked him what he meant.

"An unfinished thought," he said, screwing up his eyes as he looked at the page. "I must have wanted to say—God is my desire to realize him. . . . No, not that. . . ." He laughed, rolled the notebook up and thrust it into the wide pocket of his smock. His relations with God are indefinite, sometimes they make me think of "two bears in one lair."

18

On science.

"Science is a gold ingot concocted by a charlatan-alchemist. You want to simplify it, to make it comprehensible to everyone—in other words, to coin any amount of false money. When the people realize the true value of this money they will not thank you for it."

19

We were walking in Yusupov Park. He discoursed brilliantly on the morals of the Mos-

cow aristocracy. A big Russian wench was working almost doubled over on a flower-bed, showing her elephantine legs, her enormous, heavy breasts shaking. He looked at her attentively.

"All this splendour and extravagance was supported by caryatides like that. Not merely by the work of muzhiks and peasant wenches, not by quit rent, but literally by the blood of the people. If the aristocracy had not from time to time coupled with mares like this, it would long ago have died out. Strength cannot be expended, as it was by the young men of my day, with impunity. But after sowing their wild oats many of them married peasant lasses and produced good offspring. So here, too, the muzhik strength came to the rescue. It comes in handy everywhere. Half a generation always wastes its strength on its own pleasures, and the other half mixes its blood with the thick blood of the country people, so as to dilute it a little, too. That's good for the race."

20

He is very fond of talking about women, like a French novelist, but always with that coarseness of the Russian muzhik which used to

grate on my ears. Walking in the almond copse today, he asked Chekhov:

"Were you very dissipated in your youth?"

A. P. smiled sheepishly and muttered something, tugging at his small beard, and Tolstoi admitted, looking out to sea:

"I was an indefatigable—"

He said this regretfully, using a salty country word at the end of the sentence. And I noticed for the first time that he uttered this word quite simply, as if he knew no worthy substitute for it. And all such words sound quite simple and ordinary, coming from his bearded lips, losing in their passage their soldier-like coarseness and filth. I recall my first meeting with him and what he said to me about *Varenka Olesova*, and *Twenty-Six Men and One Woman*. From the ordinary point of view his speech was a stream of "obscenity." I was taken aback and even offended, believing that he considered me incapable of understanding any other sort of language. Now I see it was foolish of me to have been offended.

21

He was sitting on a stone bench beneath the cypresses, shrivelled, small, grey, and yet like

a Sabaoth, a little weary and trying to distract himself by imitating the warbling of a finch. The bird was singing in the dark green foliage, and Tolstoi was peering into the leaves, narrowing his small, keen eyes, thrusting out his lips like a baby and whistling feebly.

"The little thing is working itself into a frenzy! Just listen to it! What bird is it?"

I spoke about the finch and the jealousy of these birds.

"Only one song their whole life long—and jealous! Man has hundreds of songs in his heart, and he is blamed for giving way to jealousy—is that fair?" he said thoughtfully, as if asking himself the question. "There are moments when a man tells a woman more about himself than she ought to know. Afterwards he forgets he has told her, but she remembers. Perhaps jealousy comes from the fear of lowering oneself, the fear of being humiliated and appearing ridiculous. It's not the wench who takes hold of your—who is dangerous, but the one who takes hold of the soul."

When I said that there was something inconsistent with the *Kreutzer Sonata* in this, a radiant smile spread all over his beard. "I'm not a finch," he answered.

While walking in the evening he suddenly said:

"A man goes through earthquakes, epidemics, the horrors of disease, and all sorts of spiritual torments, but the most agonizing tragedy he ever knows always has been and always will be—the tragedy of the bedroom."

He brought this out with a triumphant smile—sometimes he has the broad, serene smile of a man who has overcome something excessively difficult or who has long been suffering from a gnawing pain which suddenly vanishes. Every thought burrows into his soul like a tick. He either pulls it out at once or allows it to suck its fill, till it falls off of itself, replete.

Another time, in the middle of an absorbing discourse on stoicism he suddenly frowned, clucked, and said sternly:

"Quilted, not stitched. . . ."

These words had obviously not the slightest reference to the philosophy of the stoics. Observing my astonishment he said rapidly, nodding towards the door leading into the next room: "They keep saying—a stitched counterpane."

And then he went on: "That Renan . . . sugary chatterbox."

He told me: "You relate things well—in your own words, with conviction, not bookishly."

But he almost always noted carelessness in speech, saying under his breath, as if to himself: "Uses a good Russian word, and then a word like 'absolutely,'* in the same sentence."

Sometimes he would chide me: "You combine words utterly different in spirit together—never do that!"

His sensitiveness to the forms of speech seemed to me—sometimes—morbidly acute. Once he said:

"I came across the words 'cat' and 'guts' in the same sentence in a book—revolting! It almost made me sick."

"I can't bear philologists," he would say, "they're all dry-as-dust scholars, but there is a great work on language before them. We use words we do not understand. We have no idea of the way in which many of our verbs have come into being."

He was always speaking of Dostoyevsky's language:

* Tolstoi refers to the word *absolutno*, in which the Russian adverbial ending *no* is tacked on to a foreign word.—*Tr.*

"He wrote abominably, he made his style ugly on purpose—on purpose, I'm sure, out of affectation. He loved to show off—in *The Idiot* you will find the words 'cheek,' 'swank,' 'ostentatious familiarity,' all jumbled together. I think he enjoyed mixing up colloquial Russian words with words of foreign derivation. But you will find unpardonable lapses in his writing. The Idiot says: 'The ass is a worthy and useful person,' but nobody laughs, although these words could not fail to arouse laughter, or at least some remark. He says this in front of three sisters who loved to make fun of him, especially Aglaya. The book is considered bad, but its chief blemish is that Prince Mishkin is an epileptic. If he were a healthy man his genuine naïveté, his purity of heart would touch us deeply. But Dostoyevsky had not the courage to make him a healthy man. Besides, he didn't like healthy people. He was convinced that, since he was himself a sick man, the whole world was sick. . . ."

He read Suler and me a version of the scene of the fall of Father Sergius—a ruthless scene. Suler pouted and wriggled in his excitement.

"What's the matter? Don't you like it?" asked L. N.

"It's really too cruel, it's just like Dostoyevsky. That putrid girl, and her pancake-like breasts, and all that! Why couldn't he have sinned with a beautiful, healthy woman?"

"That would have been a sin with no justification—this way his pity for the girl could be pleaded—nobody else would take her, poor thing."

"I don't understand. . . ."

"You don't understand a great deal, Lyovushka, there's no guile in you. . . ."

The wife of Andrei Lvovich came in and the conversation was broken off, and when she and Suler went to the annex L. N. said to me:

"Lyovushka is the purest man I know. He's like that himself—if he does wrong, it's out of pity for someone."

22

His favourite subjects of conversation are God, the peasant, and woman. Of literature he speaks seldom and little, as if it were an alien subject to him. And his attitude to women, as far as I can see, is one of obstinate hostility. There

is nothing he likes so much as to punish them —unless they are just ordinary women like Kitty and Natasha Rostova. Is it the revenge of a man who has not obtained as much happiness as he was capable of, or an enmity of the spirit towards the "humiliating impulses of the flesh"? Whatever it is, it is hostility, and very bitter, as in *Anna Karenina*. He talked very well of the "humiliating impulses of the flesh" on Sunday, discussing Rousseau's *Confessions* with Chekhov and Yelpatyevsky. Suler jotted down his words, but later, while making coffee, burned his notes in the flame of the spirit lamp. Before that, he had burned L. N.'s remarks about Ibsen, and lost his notes on the symbolism of marriage rites, about which L. N. had made some extremely pagan comments, here and there coinciding with those of V. V. Rosanov.

23

Some Stundists* from Feodosiya were here this morning, and all day he has been talking enthusiastically about muzhiks.

* A Baptist sect. — *Tr.*

At lunch he said:

"You should have seen them—both so robust and sturdy. One of them said: 'We have come unbidden,' and the other: 'May we leave unchidden!'" And he fairly shook with childish laughter.

After lunch, on the verandah:

"We shall soon stop understanding the language of the people altogether. Now we speak of the 'theory of progress,' 'the role of the individual in history,' the 'evolution of science,' 'dysentery,' and the muzhik says: 'It's no use looking for a needle in a haystack,' and all the theories, and history and evolution become useless, ridiculous, because the muzhik does not understand them, does not require them. But the muzhik is stronger than we are and has more staying power, and we may (who knows?) share the fate of the Atsuri tribe, of whom some scholar was told: 'All the Atsuris perished, but there is still a parrot which knows a few words of their language.'"

24

"Woman is physically more sincere than man, but her thoughts are false. When she lies she

does not believe herself, while Rousseau both lied and believed."

25

"Dostoyevsky wrote of one of his insane characters that all his life he punished himself and others because he had served that which he did not believe in. He wrote that of himself, or rather he could easily have said it about himself."

26

"Some biblical sayings are extremely obscure—what, for example, do the words: 'The earth is the Lord's, and the fulness thereof' mean? They have nothing to do with the Scriptures, they smack of p pular-scientific materialism."

"You have commented on the sense of these words somewhere," said Suler.

"What if I have. . . . Sense there may be, but I didn't get to the bottom of it."

And he gave a cunning smile.

27

He loves to put sly, embarrassing questions:

"What do you think of yourself?"

"Do you love your wife?"

"Do you consider my son Lev talented?"

"Do you like Sophia Andreyevna?"*

It is impossible to lie to him.

Once he asked:

"Do you love me, Alexei Maximovich?"

This is the playfulness of a Russian bogatyr** —Vasily Buslayev, the Novgorod daredevil, indulged in such play. He tries first one thing, then another, as if preparing for a fight. This is interesting, but I can't say I care for it. He is a devil, and I am still but an infant, he ought to let me alone.

28

Perhaps the muzhik is simply a bad smell for him, which he can never forget and feels compelled to talk about.

Last night I told him about my skirmish with the widow of General Cornet, and he laughed till he cried, laughed till it hurt, groaned and kept exclaiming in a shrill voice:

* His wife.—*Tr.*

** Legendary Russian hero of gigantic stature and strength.—*Tr.*

"With a spade! On her—! With a spade, eh? Right on her—! Was it a big spade?"

Then, after a moment's pause, he said gravely:

"You were too kind—another man in your place would have bashed her over the head. Too kind. Did you understand she wanted you?"

"I don't remember. I don't think I did."

"Of course she did. It's perfectly obvious. Of course she did."

"That didn't interest me then."

"Never mind what interested you. You're not a ladies' man, that's obvious. Another man would have made his fortune by it, become a house-owner and caroused with her for the rest of his life."

After a pause:

"You're a queer chap! Don't be offended. You're very queer. And the funny thing is that you are good-natured, though you have a perfect right to be vindictive. Yes, you might have turned out vindictive. You're strong, that's very good. . . ."

And, pausing once more, he added meditatively:

"I don't understand your mind. It's a very confused mind, but your heart is wise . . . yes, you have a wise heart."

NOTE: When I lived in Kazan I worked as yardman and gardener for the widow of General Cornet. She was French, a fat young woman with spindly, schoolgirl legs. Her eyes were exceedingly beautiful, very restless, always wide open and avid-looking. I believe she had been a shopgirl or a cook before her marriage, perhaps even a *"fille de joie."* She began drinking in the morning and would go out into the yard or the garden with nothing but a chemise under her orange-coloured dressing gown, in Tatar slippers of red morocco, her thick mane of hair pinned on the top of her head. It was very carelessly fastened and kept falling down her rosy cheeks and on to her shoulders. A young witch. She used to walk about the garden singing French songs, watching me work, and going up to the kitchen window every now and then and saying:

"Give me something, Pauline!"

"Something" was invariably one and the same thing—a glass of iced wine.

The three orphan Princesses D.-G. occupied the ground floor of the house, their father, a Commissary General, was always away, and their mother was dead. The widow had taken a dislike to the young ladies and did her best to make life miserable for them by playing all sorts of dirty tricks on them. She spoke Russian badly, but could swear to a marvel, like a regular drayman. I was disgusted with the way she treated the poor girls—they were so mournful, so intimidated, so defenceless. Once, at about midday, two of them were walking about the garden, when suddenly the General's lady appeared, drunk as usual, and began shouting at them and driving them out of the garden. They started to go without a word, but Madame Cornet stood at the gate, barring the way with her person, and letting out a stream of imprecations in Russian fit to stagger a horse. I told her to stop swearing and let the girls pass, and she shouted:

"I know you! You get in at their window in the night."

I lost my temper, took her by the shoulders and pushed her away from the gate, but she shook loose, turned her face towards me and yelled,

suddenly throwing open her dressing-gown and lifting her chemise:

"I'm nicer than those skinny rats."

Then I lost my temper in good earnest, wheeled her round and hit her with my spade on her bottom, so that she rushed through the gate into the yard, exclaiming three times, in tremendous astonishment: "Oh! Oh! Oh!"

After this I got back my passport from her housekeeper Pauline, also a drunken wench, but extremely artful, took my bundle under my arm, and departed, while the General's lady, standing at the window with a red handkerchief in her hand, shouted after me:

"I won't call the police—never mind—listen! Come back! Don't be afraid. . . ."

29

I asked him:

"Do you agree with Poznishev that the doctors have killed and are still killing people by the hundred thousand?"

"And do you want to know very badly?"

"I do."

"Then I won't tell you."

And he chuckled, twiddling his thumbs.

I remember a comparison in one of his stories of a village horseleech and a medical practitioner:

"Aren't the words 'sap,' 'haemorrhoids,' 'bleed' simply other words for 'nerves,' 'rheumatism,' 'constitution,' and so on?"

And this after Jenner, Behring, Pasteur! There's an imp for you!

30

How strange that he should like playing cards. He plays in deadly earnest, and sometimes gets very excited. And he holds the cards as nervously as if he had a live bird between his fingers, and not just bits of cardboard.

31

"Dickens said a very wise thing: 'You hold your life on the condition that to the last you shall struggle hard for it.' On the whole he was a sentimental, garrulous writer, not very wise. Of course he could construct a novel like no one else, certainly a great deal better than Balzac. Somebody said: 'Many are obsessed with the passion for writing books, but few are ashamed of them.' Balzac wasn't, nor was Dickens, and

they both wrote much that was bad. And yet Balzac was a genius, I mean he was that which can only be called a genius. . . ."

Somebody brought him Tikhomirov's *Why I Stopped Being a Revolutionary*"—Lev Nikolayevich picked it up and brandished it, saying:

"Political murder is very well treated here, showing that this method of resistance has no clearly-defined purpose. Such an idea, says this reformed murderer, can never be anything but the anarchical despotism of the individual and contempt for society, for humanity. This is well said but the words 'anarchical despotism' are a misprint, he should have said 'monarchical.' The idea is good and true, all terrorists will trip on it, I am speaking of the honest ones. Anyone who naturally likes to kill will not trip. There is no stumbling-block for him here. He is just a murderer, and fell among the terrorists by chance. . . ."

32

Sometimes he is self-satisfied and intolerable, like a sectarian from the Volga region, and as he is a bell which resounds throughout the world, this is appalling. Yesterday he said to me:

"I'm more of a muzhik than you are, and can feel as the muzhiks do better than you."

My God! He shouldn't boast of this, he really shouldn't!

33

I read him some scenes from *The Lower Depths*. He listened attentively, and then asked:

"What made you write this?"

I explained as well as I was able to.

"You rush at things like a cockerel. And another thing—you are always trying to smooth over all the seams and cracks with your own colouring. Hans Andersen says in one of his stories: 'The gilt rubs off, but the leather remains.' Our muzhiks say: 'Everything passes, truth alone remains.' Better not daub, it'll be the worse for you afterwards. And then your language is too sprightly, full of tricks, that won't do. You must write more simply, the people always talk simply, they may sound disjointed at first, but they express themselves well. The muzhik does not ask: 'How is it that a third is greater than a fourth, when four is more than three?' as a certain learned young lady did. There is no need for trick writing."

He seemed to be displeased, obviously he did not like what I had read to him at all. After a pause he said in surly tones, looking past me:

"Your old man is unlovable, one doesn't believe in his goodness. The actor's quite good. Have you read *The Fruits of Enlightenment*? I have a chef in it who is like your actor. Writing plays is very difficult. Your prostitute is good, too, that's probably what they're really like. Have you met that sort?"

"Oh, yes."

"One can see that. Truth always makes itself felt. But you speak too much from the author's point of view, your heroes are not real characters, they are all too much alike. You probably don't understand women, all your women are failures—every one. One doesn't remember them...."

Andrei Lvovich's wife came into the room to call us to tea. He rose and went out very quickly, as if glad to bring the conversation to an end.

34

"What is the most terrible dream you ever had?"

I seldom dream, and have difficulty in remembering my dreams, but two have remained in

my memory, and I shall probably not forget them for the rest of my life.

Once I dreamed of a sickly, putrid sort of sky, greenish-yellow, with round, flat stars in it, rayless and lustreless, like sores on the body of a starving man. Reddish lightning was crawling amongst them against the putrid sky; the lightning was very like a serpent and whenever it touched a star, the star swelled into a sphere and burst soundlessly, leaving in its place a dark stain, like a puff of smoke, and disappearing instantly into the putrid, watery sky. And all the stars burst, one after another, the sky grew still darker and more terrible, and then seemed to mass together, seethed, and fell in fragments on my head, in a kind of watery jelly, while in the spaces between the fragments shone the polished black surface.

L. N. said:

"You must have been reading some scientific work on astronomy, that's what your nightmare comes from. And what was the other dream?"

The other dream: a snowy plain, flat as a sheet of paper, not a mound, not a tree, not a bush, only a twig discerned faintly here and

there, sticking out of the snow. Across the snow of this lifeless desert there stretches from horizon to horizon a yellow strip of scarcely perceptible road, and a pair of grey felt boots stride s'owly along it all by themselves.

He raised his shaggy, gnome-like brows and gazed attentively at me. After a pause, he said: "That's terrible. Did you really dream it—you didn't make it up? There's something a bit bookish about it."

And suddenly he seemed to lose his temper, and said surlily, severely, tapping on his knee with one finger:

"You don't drink. And you don't look as if you had ever been given to drinking. And yet there's something bibulous in these dreams. There was a German writer called Hoffmann, and he had card tables running up and down the street and all that sort of thing—well, he was a toper—a 'calagolic,' as learned coachmen say. Boots striding about all by themselves—that's really terrible. Even if you made it up—it's very good. Terrible!"

He suddenly smiled all over his beard, so that his very cheek-bones were irradiated.

"And imagine this: all of a sudden a card

table comes running down Tverskaya Street—you know, with bent-wood legs, its boards flapping, and chalk puffing out of it—you can even make out figures on the green baize It has run away because some excisemen played vint on it night and day for three days running, and it couldn't stand any more."

He laughed, but he must have noticed that I was a little hurt by his want of faith in me.

"You're offended because your dreams seem bookish to me. Don't be offended, I know how one sometimes unconsciously makes up things which are so strange that one simply can't believe in them, and then one begins to think one must have dreamed them. An old landowner once told me he dreamed he was walking in a forest, and came out into the steppe and this is what he saw: two mounds on the steppe, and suddenly they turned into teats, and a black face rose up between them, with two moons for eyes, wall-eyed, you know, and he himself was standing between the legs of a woman, and there was a deep black abyss in front of him, sucking him in. After this his hair began to turn grey, his hands began to shake, and he went abroad to Dr. Kneipp, to take the waters. That was just

the sort of dream a man like that ought to have—he was a debauchee."

He patted me on the shoulder.

"But you're not a drinker, and not a debauchee—how is it you have such dreams?"

"I don't know."

"We know nothing about ourselves."

He sighed, narrowed his eyes and added in lower tones:

"Nothing."

This evening when we were out walking, he took my arm and said:

"Boots walking—gruesome, eh? All by themselves—tippity-tippity—and the snow crunching beneath them. Yes, it's very good. Still you're very, very bookish. Don't be angry—but that's bad, you know, it'll be in your way."

I don't think I'm more bookish than he is, and just now he seems to me an extreme rationalist, whatever he says.

35

Sometimes it seems as if he had only just arrived from somewhere far away, where people think and feel differently, treat one another

quite differently, don't even move as we do, and speak a different language. He sits in a corner, weary, grey, as if dusty with the dust of another soil, and he gazes earnestly at everyone with the eyes of an alien or a deaf mute.

Yesterday, before dinner, he came into the drawing-room looking just like that, as if he were far, far away, and then, sitting on the sofa in silence for a moment, suddenly said, swaying, rubbing his knees with the palms of his hands, and wrinkling up his face:

"That's not the end of it, no, no."

Some person, as stupid and serene as a flat-iron, asked him:

"What d'you mean?"

He gazed at him steadily, bending over, and glancing out at the verandah, where Dr. Nikitin, Yelpatyevsky and I were sitting, asked us:

"What are you talking about?"

"About Pleve."

"Pleve . . . Pleve . . . " he repeated thoughtfully, pausing between the words as if he had never heard the name before, then he shook himself as a bird does and said, with a chuckle:

"Some nonsense has been running through

my head ever since the morning. Someone told me of an inscription on a tombstone:

Here lies beneath this stone Ivan Yegoryev,
He was a tanner, soaking skins all day,
He toiled, was kind of heart, and now
He is dead, leaving his workshop to his wife.
He was not old and could have well continued
To soak his skins, but the Lord called him
To partake of heavenly life,
Friday night, the eve of Passion week.

He fell silent and then, shaking his head, smiled faintly, and added:

"There's something very touching, something quite sweet in human stupidity—when it isn't malignant. There always is."

We were called to dinner.

36

"I don't like drunkards, but I know people who get interesting after a glass or two, they acquire a wit, a beauty of thought, an aptness and an eloquence, which they do not have when they are sober. Then I am ready to bless wine."

Suler said he and Lev Nikolayevich were walking along Tverskaya Street, when Tolstoi

noticed two cuirassiers in the distance. Their brass breastplates scintillating in the sunlight, their spurs jingling, they strode along in step as if they had grown together, and their faces shone, too, with the complacency of youth and strength.

Tolstoi began abusing them.

"What majestic stupidity! Nothing but animals trained under the lash. . . ."

But when the cuirassiers had passed by he stood still, and following them with an affectionate glance, said admiringly:

"Aren't they beautiful, though! Ancient Romans, eh, Lyovushka? Strength, beauty—oh, my God! How splendid good looks are in a man —how splendid!"

37

He overtook me on the lower road, one very hot day. He was riding in the direction of Livadia, mounted on a quiet little Tatar horse. Grey, shaggy, in his mushroom-shaped hat of thin white felt, he was like a gnome.

He reined in his horse and spoke to me I walked beside his stirrup, and mentioned among

other things that I had just had a letter from V. G. Korolenko. Tolstoi wagged his beard angrily.

"Does he believe in God?"

"I don't know."

"You don't know the most important thing. He believes, but is ashamed of admitting it in front of atheists."

He spoke grumblingly, peevishly, narrowing his eyes angrily. I could see I was in his way, but when I made as if to leave him, he stopped me.

"What's the matter? I'm riding slowly."

And again growled out:

"Your Andreyev is afraid of the atheists too, but he believes in God too, and he is afraid of God."

At the border of the estate of Grand Duke A. M. Romanov, three of the Romanovs stood close together in the road, talking—the owner of the Ai-Todor estate, Georgy, and another—Pyotr Nikolayevich, from Dyulber, I think—all fine, tall men. The road was barred by a one-horse carriage, and a saddle horse. Lev Nikolayevich could not pass. He bent a stern, exacting gaze on the Romanovs. But they were standing with their backs to us. The saddle

horse shifted its feet and moved aside, letting Tolstoi's horse pass.

After riding on for a minute or two in silence, he said:

"They recognized me, the boors!"

And a minute later:

"The horse knew it must make way for Tolstoi."

38

"Look after yourself, first and foremost for your own sake, then you will be doing plenty for others."

39

"What do we mean when we say we 'know'? I know I'm Tolstoi, a writer, I have a wife, children, grey hair, an ugly face, a beard—all that's in my passport. But they don't enter the soul in passports, all I know about my soul is that it craves nearness to God. But what is God? That of which my soul is a particle. That's all. Anyone who has learned to think finds it hard to believe, but one can only live in God through faith. Tertullian said: 'Thought is evil.'"

Despite the monotonousness of his preachings, this incredible man is boundlessly versatile.

While talking to the mullah of Gaspra in the park today, he held himself like a trustful country bumpkin for whom the hour to think of his last days had struck. Small as he actually was, he seemed to be trying to make himself still shorter, and standing beside the strong, sturdy Tatar, he looked like a little old man who had only just begun to meditate over the meaning of life and was overwhelmed by the problems it presented. Raising his shaggy brows in surprise, his keen eyes blinking timidly, he dimmed their intolerable, penetrating brilliance. His searching gaze rested motionless on the mullah's broad face, and the pupils of his eyes lost the keenness that people found so disconcerting. He asked the mullah "childish" questions about the meaning of life, the soul and God, capping stanzas from the Koran with stanzas from the New Testament and the prophets with remarkable dexterity. In reality he was play-acting, and that with an extraordinary skill only possible to a great artist and sage.

And a few days ago, talking to Taneyev and

Suler about music, he fell into childish raptures over its beauty, and you could see he enjoyed his own raptures—or rather his ability to feel them. He said no one had written so well and so profoundly about music as Schopenhauer, and while he was about it, told a funny story about Fet, and called music "the dumb prayer of the soul."

"Why dumb?" questioned Suler.

"Because it has no words. There is more soul in sounds than in thoughts. Thought is a purse containing copper coins, sound is unsmirched by anything, inwardly pure."

He used touching childish words with evident enjoyment, suddenly recalling the best and tenderest of them. And then, smiling in his beard, he said softly, almost caressingly:

"All musicians are stupid people; the more talented a musician, the more narrow-minded he is. And strange to say they are almost all religious."

41

To Chekhov, on the telephone:

"Today is such a delightful day for me, I feel so happy that I want you to be happy too. Especially you! You're so nice, so very nice!"

42

He does not listen to or believe people when they say the wrong thing. As a matter of fact he does not ask, he interrogates.

Like a collector of rarities he only accepts what will not spoil the harmony of his collection.

43

Going through the mail:

"They make a great noise, they write, and when I die—they'll say, a year after: 'Tolstoi? Wasn't that the Count who went in for cobbling, and then something or other happened to him?'"

44

More than once I caught on his face and in his glance the sly, satisfied smile of a man who has suddenly come upon a thing he had hidden. He hid something and then forgot the place. For many days he lived in secret anxiety, wondering persistently: where can I have put this thing I need so much? And he feared people would notice his anxiety, his loss, and do something unpleasant, something he would not like. And suddenly he remembers, and finds it.

Filled with joy, and no longer bothering to conceal it, he looks slyly at everyone, as if saying:

"You can't hurt me now!"

But he says not a word of what he has found, and where he found it.

One never stops marvelling at him, but one would not care to see him too often, and I could never live in the same house—not to mention the same room—with him. Being with him is like being on a plain where everything has been burned up by the sun, and where even the sun is burning itself out, threatening endless dark night.

THE LETTER

Just after I posted a letter to you, came the telegram announcing "the flight of Tolstoi." And as you see I am writing again, while I still feel in mental contact with you.

No doubt everything I feel inclined to say in connection with this news will be muddled, perhaps even harsh and uncharitable—you must forgive me—I feel as if someone had seized me by the throat and were strangling me.

He talked to me a great deal and at length. When I lived at Gaspra, in the Crimea, I often went to see him, and he was fond of visiting me, too. I read his books with earnest attention and with love, so it seems to me that I have a right to say what I think about him, even if this is very bold of me, and if what I say runs counter to the common opinion of him. I know as well as anyone else that there never was a man more deserving of being called a genius, more complicated and self-contradictory, and more splendid in every way, yes—in every way. He is splendid both in the specific and broad sense, in a way which can hardly be put into words at all. There is something in him which always arouses in me the desire to shout to all and sundry: look what a marvellous man there is living on our planet! For he is, so to say, all-embracing, and a human being first and foremost—a man among men.

But I have always been repelled by his stubborn, tyrannical efforts to turn the life of Count Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoi into the "life of the Saintly Father Lev." He has been working himself up to "suffer" for a long time, you know. He told Yevgeni Solovyov and Suler how sorry

he was that he had not so far brought this off—he did not want to suffer simply from a natural desire to test the strength of his will, but with an obviously—I repeat it—stubborn intention to increase the weight of his doctrines, to make his preaching irresistible, to sanctify it in the eyes of men by suffering, and to compel them to accept it—to compel them, you understand. For he knows very well that his preaching is not convincing enough. When his diaries are published you will see some fine specimens of scepticism, applied by him to his own teaching and his personality. He knows that "martyrs and sufferers are almost invariably tyrants and oppressors"—he knows everything. And yet he says: "If I were to suffer for my ideas they would create quite a different impression." This has always repelled me in him, for I cannot help feeling in it an attempt to coerce me, the desire to dominate my conscience, to dazzle it with the sight of a martyr's blood, to place round my neck the yoke of dogmas.

He has always and everywhere sung paeans to immortality in the next world, but immortality in this world would be more to his taste. A national writer in the truest sense of the word,

he embodies in his great soul all the bad qualities of the nation, all the mutilation inflicted on us by the tortures of our history. . . . Everything in him is national, and his whole preaching is mere reaction, atavism, that which we were beginning to shake off, to overcome.

Remember his letter, "The Intellectuals, the State, the People," written in 1905—what an unpleasant, spiteful thing that was! All through it can be detected the spiteful "I told you so!" of the dissenter. I wrote him a reply at the time, based on his own words to me, that he had "long forfeited the right to speak about the Russian people, and in their name," for I have been a witness of his unwillingness to listen to and understand the people who came to have a heart-to-heart talk with him. My letter was harsh, and I did not post it.

And he is now making what is probably his last leap in the hope of giving his ideas the highest possible significance. Like Vasily Buslayev he has always been fond of such leaps, but always towards the confirmation of his own sanctity and his searchings for a halo. This smacks of the Inquisition, though his teachings

are justified by the ancient history of Russia and the personal sufferings of genius. Sanctity is to be attained through the contemplation of sin and the enslavement of the will to live. . . .

There is much in Lev Nikolayevich that has often aroused in me feelings akin to hatred, much that falls like a heavy burden on my soul. His inordinately swollen ego is a monstrous phenomenon, almost abnormal, there is in it something of the Bogatyr Svyatogor, whose weight the earth could not support. Yes, he is great! I am profoundly convinced that, in addition to everything he says, there is much about which he is silent—even in his own diaries—and about which he will probably never speak to a soul. This "something" only makes itself felt occasionally, tentatively, in his talk, and hints of it are to be found in the two diaries he gave me and L. A. Sulerzhitsky to read. It seems to me something like a "denial of all that has been said"—the most profound and arrant nihilism which has sprung up and developed on the soil of infinite despair and loneliness, which nothing has ever been able to destroy, and which probably no one before has ever felt with such appalling clarity. He has often

struck me as an inflexible man, indifferent, in the depths of his heart, to human beings—he is so much higher and more powerful than they are that he regards them as gnats, and their preoccupations as ridiculous and pitiful. He has retreated from them too far into some desert, where, with the utmost concentration of all the forces of his spirit, he regards in solitude the "most important of all"—death.

All his life he has dreaded and hated death, all his life he has been haunted by the spectre of the Arzamas famine—must he, Tolstoi, die? The eyes of the whole world, the universe, are upon him. Living, quivering threads extend to him from China, India, America; his soul is for all men and all times. Why should not nature make an exception from her rules and bestow upon him—alone among men—physical immortality? Of course he is much too reasonable and intelligent to believe in miracles, and yet, on the other hand, he is a rebel, an explorer, he is like a young recruit, wild with fear and despair when confronted by the unknown barracks. I remember once at Gaspra, after his recovery, having read Lev Shestov's *Good and Evil in the Teachings of Nietzsche and Count*

Tolstoi, he said, in reply to A. P. Chekhov's remark that he "did not like the book":

"And I found it amusing. Affectedly written, but it's not bad, it's interesting. You know I like cynics if they are sincere. He says somewhere: 'Truth is not required,' and he is quite right—what is truth to him? He'll die anyhow."

And, evidently noticing that his words had not been understood, he added, chuckling gleefully:

"Once a man has learned to think, all his thoughts are bound up with the thought of his own death. All philosophers are like that. And what's the good of truths, since death is sure to come?"

Further he proceeded to explain that truth is the same for all—love of God, but he spoke indifferently and wearily on this subject. On the verandah after lunch he picked up the book again, and finding the place where the author says: "Tolstoi, Dostoyevsky and Nietzsche could not live without an answer to their questions, and any answer would be better for them than none," he laughed, saying:

"What a daring barber, he says straight out that I deceive myself, which means I deceive others, too. This is the obvious conclusion. . . ."

Suler asked: "But why 'barber'?"

"Well," he said thoughtfully, "it just came into my mind that he was a fashionable dandy, and I remembered a barber from Moscow at the wedding of his peasant uncle in the village. Marvellous manners, can dance the lancers, and therefore despises everyone."

I give this conversation almost word for word. I remember it very distinctly, I even jotted it down, as I did everything that struck me. Suler and I made many notes, but Suler lost his on the way to Arzamas, where he visited me—he was very careless, and though he loved Lev Nikolayevich with an almost feminine love, his attitude to him was a little strange, almost condescending. I too put my notes away somewhere and can't find them, they must be in Russia. I observed Tolstoi very closely, for I have always sought, and shall seek to the day of my death, for a man of real, living faith. And also because A. P. Chekhov, speaking of our lack of culture, once complained:

"Look, every word Goethe said was written down, but Tolstoi's voice goes unrecorded. That's dreadfully Russian, old boy! Afterwards people will wake up, and start writing reminiscences full of distortions."

But to proceed—on the subject of Shestov:

"'One can't live,' he says, 'always gazing at terrible visions'—how does he know what one can do and what one can't? If he knew, if he saw visions, he wouldn't write trivialities, he would occupy himself with something serious, as Buddha did all his life. . . ."

Someone remarked that Shestov was a Jew.

"Hardly!" said L. N. incredulously. "He's not a bit like a Jew. There aren't any atheist Jews—name a single one. There aren't any."

Sometimes it seems as if this old magician is playing with death, flirting with it, trying to get the better of it somehow: I'm not afraid of you, I love you, I am waiting for you. And all the time his small, keen eyes are peering about—what are you like? And what is there behind you? Do you mean to destroy me altogether, or will something be left of me?

His words: "I'm happy, awfully happy, too happy!" leave a strange impression. And—immediately afterwards: "Oh, to suffer!" To suffer—that, too, is sincere in him. I do not for a moment doubt that, while still convalescent, he would be sincerely glad to find himself in prison, in exile, in a word to accept the martyr's

crown. Is it that he feels as if martyrdom would somewhat justify death, would make it more comprehensible, easier to accept—from the external, formal point of view? And I'm sure he has never been happy—neither in the "books of wisdom," nor "on the back of a horse," nor "in the arms of a woman," has he enjoyed to the full the bliss of "the earthly paradise." He is too rationally-minded for that, and knows life and people too well. Some more words of his:

"Caliph Abd-er-Rahman had fourteen happy days in his life and I don't suppose I ever had so many. And all because I have never lived—I don't know how to live—for myself, for my soul, but have always lived for effect, for others."

As we were leaving, Chekhov said: "I don't believe he has never been happy." I do. He hasn't. But it's not true that he lived "for effect." He always gave to others, as to beggars, of his surplus. He was fond of making them "do" things—read, walk, live on vegetables, love the peasant and believe in the infallibility of the rational and religious ideas of Lev Tolstoi. You've got to give people something which either satisfies or occupies them, in order to get rid of them. Why

couldn't they leave a man alone, in his habitual, torturing, but sometimes cosy solitude, facing the bottomless swamp—the question of "the great thing."

All Russian preachers, with the exception of Avvakum and, possibly, Tikhon Zadonsky, have been frigid people, not possessing an active, lively faith. In my *Lower Depths*, I tried to create that sort of old man—Luka. It was "all sorts of answers," and not people, that interested him. He could not help coming up against people, he consoled them, but only so that they should not get in his way. And the whole philosophy, the whole preaching of such individuals, amounts to alms given away by them with concealed disgust, and beneath their preaching can be heard words which are plaintive and beggarly:

"Leave me alone! Love God and your neighbour, but leave me alone! Curse God, love those far removed, but leave me alone! Leave me alone, for I am but a man, and . . . doomed to die."

Alas, life is, and long will be, like this! It could not be and never can be otherwise, for human beings are harassed, tortured, terribly isolated, and all shackled by a loneliness which saps at their

souls. I shouldn't be a bit surprised if L. N. were to be reconciled to the Church. There would be a logic of its own in this—all men are equally insignificant, even bishops. As a matter of fact, this would not be reconciliation, for him personally this act would merely be a logical step: "I forgive those who hate me." A Christian deed, and beneath it a light, keen mockery, it might be understood as a wise man's revenge on fools.

But I am not writing the way I wanted to, nor about the things I wanted to. There's a dog howling in my soul, and disaster flickers before my eyes. The papers have just come and I can see how it will be. A legend is being created in your part of the world, "once upon a time there were idlers and drones, and they brought forth—a saint." Only think what harm this will do to our country, and at a time when the folk are hanging their heads in disillusion, and the souls of the majority are void and barren, and those of the elect are filled with melancholy. All these hungry, ravaged souls are clamouring for a myth. People are so longing to relieve themselves of pain, to assuage their tortures. And it is just the myth he wished for, and just what is

so undesirable—the life of a holy man, a saint —whereas the greatness and sanctity of him is that he is a *man*, a man of maddening, torturing beauty, a man among men. I seem to be contradicting myself here, but never mind. He is a man seeking God not for himself, but for others, so that he, a man, may be left in peace in the desert he has chosen. He has given us the New Testament, and, to make us forget the conflicts within Christ himself, he has simplified His image, smoothed down the aggressive elements in Him and substituted for them "obedience to the will of Him who has sent me." There is no gainsaying that Tolstoi's New Testament is much more acceptable, it suits the "ailments" of the Russian people better. Something had to be given to these people, for they complain, their groans shake the earth and distract mankind from the "great thing." And *War and Peace* and everything in that line do nothing to assuage the grief and despair of the mournful Russian land.

Of *W.&.P.* he said himself: "Setting aside false modesty, it is another *Iliad.*" M. I. Chaikovsky heard from Tolstoi's own lips much the same appraisal of his *Childhood* and *Boyhood.*

Some journalists have just been from Naples—one even rushed over from Rome. They ask me to tell them what I think of Tolstoi's "flight"—that's what they call it—"flight." I refused to speak to them. You understand, of course, that my soul is in a terrific turmoil—I don't want to see Tolstoi turned into a saint. Let him remain a sinner, close to the heart of the sinful world, for ever close to the heart of each of us. Pushkin and he—there is nothing greater and dearer to us. . . .

Lev Tolstoi is dead.

A telegram has come, where it says in commonplace words—he is dead.

It was a blow at the heart, I wept from pain and grief, and now, in a kind of half-crazed state, I picture him, as I knew him, as I saw him, I feel an anguished desire to talk about him. I picture him in his coffin, lying there like a smooth stone on the bed of a stream, no doubt with his deceptive smile—so utterly detached—quietly hidden away in his grey beard. And his hands at last quietly folded—they have completed their arduous task.

I remember his keen eyes—they saw through

everything—and his fingers, which always seemed to be modelling something in the air, his talk, his jests, his beloved peasant words, and that strangely indefinite voice of his. And I see how much of life that man embraced, how superhumanly wise he was—how eerie.

I saw him once as probably no one else ever saw him. I was walking along the seashore to Gaspra and suddenly, just outside the Yusupov estate, among the rocks, caught sight of his small, angular figure, clad in a crumpled grey suit and crushed hat. He sat there, his chin resting on his hands, the grey hairs of his beard straggling from between his fingers, gazing out to sea, while at his feet the greenish wavelets rolled submissively and affectionately, as if telling their story to the old wizard. It was a day of glancing light, the shadows of clouds crept over the rocks, so that the old man and the rocks were alternately lit up, and in shadow. The rocks, huge, with deep clefts in them, were covered with pungent seaweed—there had been a violent storm the day before. And he seemed to me like an ancient rock suddenly come to life, knowing the beginning and purpose of all things, and wondering when and what would be

the end of stones and grass on the earth, of water in the ocean, and of man and the whole world, from rocks to the sun. The sea was like a part of his soul, and all around emanated from him, was part of him. Plunged in brooding immobility, the old man suggested something prophetic, enchanted, profound, in the gloom beneath him, disappearing in quest of something into the heights of the blue void above the earth, as if it were he—the concentration of his will—who was summoning and dismissing the waves, guiding the movements of the clouds and shadows which seemed to be shifting the rocks, waking them. And suddenly I felt, in a moment of madness, that he was going to rise, to wave his hand, and the sea would become motionless, glassy, the rocks would move and cry out, and all around would come to life, everything would find its voice, speak in multitudinous tongues of itself, of him, against him. It is impossible to put into words what I felt at that moment —there was ecstasy and horror in my soul, and then all was fused in the blissful thought:

"I am not an orphan in this world so long as this man inhabits it."

Then, carefully, so as not to rattle the peb-

bles underfoot, I turned back, unwilling to disturb his meditations. And now—I do feel that I am an orphan, my tears fall as I write—never before have I wept so disconsolately, so hopelessly, so bitterly. I don't even know if I loved him, but what does it matter whether it was love or hate that I felt for him? He always stirred emotions in my soul, vast, fantastic agitation. Even the disagreeable or hostile feelings that he aroused would assume forms that did not oppress but seemed to explode within one's soul, expanding it, making it more sensitive, giving it greater capacity. He was very imposing when, with an imperious shuffle, as if treading out the unevenness of the ground with the soles of his feet, he would suddenly appear from behind a door, or round a corner, advancing upon one with the short, light, rapid steps of a man accustomed to moving constantly over the surface of the world, his thumbs thrust into his belt, halting for a second and casting a searching glance around him, which took in everything new and immediately absorbed its significance.

"How d'you do!"

I always interpreted these words as follows: "How d'you do— I know there's not much pleas-

ure for me or sense for you in it, but, just the same: How d'you do!"

In he came—a little man. And instantly everyone seemed to be smaller than he was. His peasant's beard, his rough but extraordinary hands, his simple clothes, all this external cosy democratic look of his, deceived many people, and very often some simple Russian soul, accustomed to greet a man according to his clothes—an ancient servile habit—would let himself go in a fragrant gushing stream of "spontaneity," which might be more exactly designated "familiarity."

"Oh, you dear man! So this is you! At last I can look my fill on the greatest son of my native earth! Greetings, greetings, accept my obeisance!"

That is the Moscow-Russian way, simple and cordial, but there is yet another Russian style—the "free-thinking" style:

"Lev Nikolayevich! Disagreeing with your religious and philosophical views, but profoundly respecting in your person a great artist. . . ."

And suddenly from beneath the peasant beard, the crumpled, democratic smock, would emerge the old Russian gentleman, the splendid aristocrat—and the frank ones, the educated

ones and the rest, would turn blue from the searing chill. It was a pleasure to see this pure-blooded individual, to note the nobility and grace of his gestures, the proud reserve of his speech, to listen to the exquisite precision of his devastating words. There was just enough of the fine gentleman in him to deal with serfs. And when they summoned into being the grand seigneur in Tolstoi, he appeared before them with easy lightness, crushing them so that they could only cringe and squeal.

I once travelled with one of these "simple" Russians from Yasnaya Polyana to Moscow; it took him a long time to recover his balance, and he kept repeating distractedly with a piteous smile:

"My, what a trouncing! Wasn't he fierce, my word!"

And then he exclaimed ruefully:

"Why, I thought he really was an anarchist! Everybody keeps calling him an anarchist, and I believed them. . . ."

He was a wealthy man, a great industrialist, he had a big belly and a fat face the colour of raw meat—why should he have wanted Tolstoi to be an anarchist? This remains one of the "profound secrets" of the Russian soul.

When L. N. wished to please he could do this more easily than a beautiful, intelligent woman. He is seated in the midst of a varied circle—Grand Duke Nikolai Mikhailovich, the house painter Ilya, a Social-Democrat from Yalta, the Stundist Patsuk, a musician, Countess Kleinmichel's bailiff, the poet Bulgakov—all gazing at him with enamoured eyes. He is expounding to them the philosophy of Lao-tse, and he appears to me like a wonderful one-man orchestra, endowed with the ability to play on several instruments simultaneously—a trumpet, a drum, an accordion, and a flute. I, too, gazed at him. And now I long to gaze at him once more—and I shall never see him again.

Reporters have been here, they say a telegram was received in Rome, refuting the rumour of the death of Lev Tolstoi. They made a great fuss and chatter, glibly expressing their sympathy for Russia. The Russian papers leave no room for doubt.

It was impossible to lie to him—even from pity. He might be dangerously ill without arous-

ing pity. It is fatuous to pity people like him. They must be looked after and cherished, the dust of worn-out, callous words must not be sprinkled on them.

"You don't like me, do you?" he asked. And the answer had to be: "No, I don't."

"You don't love me, do you?" "No, I don't love you today."

He was ruthless in his questions, reserved in his replies as befits a sage.

He spoke marvellously about the past, and best of all about Turgenev. Fet, he always mentioned with a good-humoured chuckle, always remembered something comic about him; of Nekrasov he spoke coldly, sceptically, but he spoke about writers in general as if they were his children, and he a father who knew all their shortcomings, but was defiantly determined to make more of the bad in them than of the good. And whenever he spoke derogatorily about anyone I always felt as if he were bestowing alms upon his hearers; it was disconcerting to listen to his criticisms, one lowered one's eyes involuntarily beneath his keen smile—and nothing remained in one's memory.

Once he argued vehemently that G. I. Uspen-

sky wrote in a Tula dialect and had no talent. And yet he said to A. P. Chekhov in my presence:

"There's a writer for you! By the force of his sincerity he reminds one of Dostoyevsky, but Dostoyevsky was fond of intriguing and showing off—Uspensky is much more simple and sincere. If he believed in God, he would be sure to be some sort of a dissenter."

"But you said he was a Tula writer and had no talent."

His eyes disappeared beneath his shaggy brows, and he said:

"He wrote badly. D'you call that language? More punctuation marks than words. Talent is love. He who loves is talented. Just look at lovers—they're all talented."

He spoke about Dostoyevsky with evident reluctance, stiffly, evasively, as though trying to overcome something.

"He ought to have studied the doctrines of Confucius or the Buddhists, they would have calmed him. That is the great thing, which everyone ought to know. He was a violently sensual man—when he got angry, bumps appeared on his bald spot, and his ears twitched. He felt

much, but did not know how to think, he learned to think from the Fourierists, from Butashevich and that lot. And then he hated them all his life. There was something Jewish in his blood. He was mistrustful, vain, cantankerous and miserable. It's a funny thing that so many people read him—I can't understand why. After all it's difficult and futile—all those Idiots, Hobbledehoys, Raskolnikovs and the rest, weren't a bit like that, everything was much simpler and more comprehensible really. Leskov, now, why don't people read him? He's a real writer —have you read him?"

"Oh, yes! I love him, especially his language!"

"He knew the language marvellously, he could do anything with it. Funny you should like him, there's something un-Russian about you, your thoughts are not Russian thoughts—you don't mind my saying that, you're not hurt? I'm an old man, and perhaps I'm no longer capable of understanding modern literature, but it always seems to me that it is in some way un-Russian. People are writing a peculiar sort of verses—I don't know what these verses are for, who they are for. We must learn to write poetry from Pushkin, Tyutchev, Shenshin (Fet). You,

now—" he turned to Chekhov—"you're Russian. Yes, you're very, very Russian."

And he put his arm round Chekhov's shoulders with an affectionate smile, much to the embarrassment of Chekhov, who began talking about his house and the Tatars in a bass voice.

He loved Chekhov, and when he looked at him, his glance, almost tender at that moment, seemed to be caressing Chekhov's face. One day Chekhov was walking along one of the paths in the park with Alexandra Lvovna,* and Tolstoi, who was at that time still an invalid, sat in an armchair on the verandah, and seemed to go out towards Chekhov with his whole being.

"What a charming, fine man! Modest, quiet, just like a young woman. He even walks like a girl. He's simply wonderful!" he said in a low voice.

One evening, in the twilight, frowning, his eyebrows twitching, he read us a version of the scene from *Father Sergius* in which the woman goes to the hermit to seduce him; he read it right through, raised his head, closed his eyes and said distinctly:

* Tolstoi's daughter.— *Tr.*

"The old man wrote it well—very well!"

It was said with such exquisite simplicity, the admiration of the beauty of his own writing was so sincere, that I shall never forget the rapture I felt then—a rapture I never could put into words, and which it cost me an enormous effort to conceal. My very heart seemed to stand still, and the next moment everything seemed revivifying, fresh, new.

The inexpressible individual charm of his speech, so incorrect on the surface, with such incessant repetitions of certain words, so saturated with a peasant-like simplicity, could only be understood by those who watched him talk. The force of his words lay not only in his intonations and in the liveliness of his features, but in the play and gleam of his eyes, the most eloquent eyes I have ever seen anywhere. L. N. had a thousand eyes in one pair.

Suler, Chekhov, Sergei Lvovich and someone else were sitting in the park talking about women; he listened to them in silence for a long time and then said suddenly:

"I shall tell the truth about women when I have one foot in the grave. Then I'll jump into my coffin and hide under the lid—try and catch

me then!" And his eyes gleamed so defiantly and terrifyingly that nobody spoke for a few moments.

The way I see it he combined in himself the audacity of Vasily Buslayev, something of the stubborn soul of Father Avvakum, while above all this, or beside it, there hid the scepticism of Chaadayev. The Avvakum element preached, torturing the artist's soul, the Novgorod rogue in him made him denounce Dante and Shakespeare, while the Chaadayev element chuckled over these amusements—and tortures—of the soul.

It was the traditional Russian in him that made him denounce science and the state principle—the Russian driven to passive anarchism by the futility of the innumerable attempts at building life on humane lines.

Here is a remarkable thing: by the force of some mysterious intuition, Olaf Gulbransson, the cartoonist of *Simplicissimus*, discovered the Buslayev feature in Tolstoi. Look at the drawing attentively, and you'll see what likeness there is to the real Lev Tolstoi, what an audacious mind looks at you from that face with the deep-set eyes, the mind of one for whom

nothing is sacred, who has no superstitions or idle beliefs.

There he stands before me, this wizard, alien to everyone, travelling alone over those deserts of thought in which he sought in vain for the all-embracing truth. I gaze at him, and though the pain of the loss is great, pride in having seen that man softens my pain and grief.

It was strange to see L. N. amongst the "Tolstoians"; he stands in their midst like some majestic belfry, and his bell tolls out ceaselessly to the whole world, while all around him scamper small, stealthy curs, yelping to the tones of the bell, and eyeing one another mistrustfully, as if to see which of them was yapping best. I always felt that these people filled both the house at Yasnaya Polyana and the mansion of Countess Panina with the spirit of hypocrisy, cowardice, bargaining, and the expectation of legacies. There is something in common between the "Tolstoians" and those pilgrims who traverse Russia from end to end, carrying the bones of dogs which they give out to be fragments of holy relics, and trading in "Egyptian darkness" and the "tears" of the Mother of God. I remember one of these apostles refusing

an egg at Yasnaya Polyana out of sympathy for the hen, but devouring meat with relish in the station buffet at Tula, and saying:

"The old chap exaggerates!"

They are almost all given to sighing and kissing, they all have sweaty, boneless hands and deceitful eyes. At the same time these are practical folk, who manage their worldly affairs very skilfully.

L. N., of course, appraised the "Tolstoians" at their true value, and so did Sulerzhitsky, whom he loved tenderly, always speaking of him with youthful fervour and admiration. One day a certain individual related eloquently at Yasnaya Polyana how easy his life had become, and how pure his soul, since adopting the doctrines of Tolstoi. L. N. bent towards me and said softly:

"He's lying, the rascal, but he's doing it to give me pleasure."

There were many who tried to give him pleasure, but I never saw anyone do it really well. He very seldom spoke to me about his customary subjects—universal forgiveness, love for one's neighbour, the New Testament and Buddhism—having evidently realized from the very

start that all this was "not for the likes of me." I deeply appreciated this.

He could be most charmingly tactful, sympathetic and gentle when he liked, and then his speech would be of an enchanting simplicity and grace, but sometimes it was quite disagreeable to listen to him. I never liked the way he talked about women—in this respect he spoke too much like "the common man," and something unnatural sounded through his words, something insincere, and yet, at the same time, extremely personal. It was as if he had once been hurt by someone, and could neither forget nor forgive the injury. On the evening of my first acquaintance with him he took me into his study—it was at Khamovniki—seated me before him, and began talking about *Varenka Olesova* and *Twenty-Six Men and One Woman*. I was depressed by his tone, quite disconcerted, so crudely and harshly did he endeavour to convince me that shame is not natural to a healthy young girl.

"If a girl has passed her fifteenth birthday and is healthy, she wants someone to kiss her and pull her about. Her mind recoils from that which it neither knows nor understands, and that's what people call chastity and shame.

But her flesh already knows that the incomprehensible is inevitable, legitimate, already demands the fulfilment of this law, despite her mind. Your Varenka Olesova is described as healthy, but her feelings are those of an anaemic creature—that's all wrong!"

He then began to speak of the girl in *Twenty-Six*, uttering one obscenity after another with a simplicity which I found brutal and which even offended me. Afterwards I realized that he only used these "forbidden" words because he found them the most precise and pointed, but at the time his way of speaking was disagreeable to me. I did not contradict him—suddenly he became kind and considerate, asking me about my life, my studies, my reading.

"Are you really as well-read as they say? Is Korolenko a musician?"

"I don't think so. I don't know."

"Don't you? Do you like his stories?"

"Very much."

"That's because of the contrast. He's a poet, and there's nothing of the poet about you. Have you read Weltmann?"

"Yes."

"A good writer, isn't he? Bright, exact, never exaggerates. Sometimes he's better than Gogol. He knew Balzac. Gogol imitated Marlinsky, you know."

When I said that Gogol had probably been influenced by Hoffmann, Sterne, and possibly Dickens, he shot a glance at me, and said:

"Where did you read that? You didn't? It's not true. I don't suppose Gogol read Dickens. But you really have read a lot—take care—that's dangerous. Koltsov ruined himself that way."

When he saw me off he put his arms round me and kissed me, saying:

"You're a real muzhik! You'll have a hard time amongst the writers, but don't let anything scare you, always say what you think, never mind if it's rude sometimes. Clever people will understand."

This first meeting created a dual impression on me—I was both happy and proud to have met Tolstoi, but his talk had been rather like a cross-examination, and I felt as if I had seen not the author of *The Cossacks, Kholstomer, War and Peace*, but a gentleman who had condescended to me and considered it necessary to speak to me in a kind of "popular" manner, using the lan-

guage of the streets, and this had upset my idea of him—an idea to which I had become accustomed, and which was dear to me.

The next time I saw him was at Yasnaya. It was a dull day in autumn, with a fine drizzle, and he put on a heavy overcoat and high leather boots, regular waders, and took me for a walk in a birch copse. He jumped ditches and puddles with youthful alacrity, shaking the raindrops from the branches on to his head, all the time giving me a brilliant account of how Shenshin (Fet) had explained Schopenhauer to him in this very copse. And he stroked the damp, silky trunks of the birch-trees lovingly.

"I read some verses lately:

There are no more mushrooms, but all the hollows
Are fragrant with the damp smell of mushrooms

—that's good, very well observed."

Suddenly a hare started right under our feet. L. N. jumped up, wildly excited. His cheeks turned scarlet, and he came out with a loud "tally-ho!" Then he looked at me with an indescribable smile and gave a wise, very human laugh. He was admirable at that moment.

Another time, in the park, he looked up at a hawk, soaring over the farmyard, circling it, and then poising motionless in the sky, its wings moving faintly, as if uncertain whether to swoop now, or wait a bit. L. N. was on the alert at once, covering his eyes with the palm of his hand and whispering nervously:

"The rascal is after our chickens! Look, look —now—oh, he's afraid! Perhaps the coachman is there—we must call the coachman. . . ."

And he did. When he shouted, the hawk took fright and flew away.

L. N. sighed and said with evident self-reproach:

"I shouldn't have shouted—he would have gone away anyhow. . . ."

Once, when speaking to him about Tiflis, I mentioned V. V. Flerovsky-Bervi.

"Did you know him?" asked L. N. eagerly. "Tell me something about him."

I began telling him that Flerovsky was tall, with a long beard, thin, big-eyed, wore a long sailcloth robe, with a little bag of rice boiled in red wine hanging from his belt, and went about with a huge canvas umbrella; that he had roved with me the mountain paths of the Transcauca-

sus, where once, in a narrow path, we encountered a bull from which we escaped by threatening the surly beast with the open umbrella, backing all the time at the risk of falling into the abyss. Suddenly I noticed tears in the eyes of L. N., and broke off in embarrassment.

"Never mind, go on, go on! It's only the pleasure of hearing about a good man! What an interesting man he must have been! That's just how I imagined him—not like other people! He is the most mature, the wisest of all the radical writers, he shows very ably in his primer that the whole of our civilization is barbarous, while culture is the affair of peaceful tribes, the affair of the weak, not of the strong, and the struggle for existence is a lie invented to justify evil. You don't agree with this, no doubt. But Daudet does, remember his Paul Astier."

"How is one to reconcile Flerovsky's theory with the role of the Normans in the history of Europe, for instance?"

"Oh, the Normans! That's different."

If he had no answer ready, he would say: "That's different."

I always felt, and I do not think I was mistaken, that L. N. did not like talking about lit-

erature, but was intensely interested in the personality of the writer. I very often heard his questions: "Do you know him? What's he like? Where was he born?" And his discussions nearly always displayed the individual from a very special point of view.

Of V. G. Korolenko he said thoughtfully:

"He's a Ukrainian, and so he should be able to see our life better and more clearly than we see it ourselves."

Of Chekhov, whom he loved so tenderly:

"His profession spoilt him. If he hadn't been a doctor he would have written still better."

Of one of the younger writers he said:

"He plays at being an Englishman, and Moscow people are no good at that."

He told me more than once:

"You're a romancer. All your Kuvaldas and the rest are pure inventions."

I remarked that Kuvalda had been taken from life.

"Tell me where you met him."

He was greatly amused by the scene in the office of Kolontayev, the Kazan Justice of the Peace, where I first saw the man I described under the name of Kuvalda.

"Blue blood! Blue blood—that's it!" he said, laughing and wiping his eyes. "But what a charming, amusing fellow! You tell stories better than you write. You're a romantic, you know—an inventor, you might as well admit it."

I said that probably all writers invented to a certain extent, showing people as they would have liked them to be in real life. I said, too, that I liked active people, people who aspired to oppose the evil in life with all their powers, even with violence.

"But violence itself is the chief evil!" he cried, taking my arm. "How are you going to get away from that, Scribe? *My Fellow-Traveller*, now—that's no invention, it's good, because not invented. It's when you start thinking that all your people come out knights, Amadises and Siegfrieds. . . ."

I remarked that so long as we go on living completely surrounded by inevitable ape-like "fellow-travellers," everything built by us will be built on sand, in a hostile environment.

He chuckled, nudging me gently with his elbow.

"Very, very dangerous conclusions might be drawn from this. You're no true Socialist. You're

a romantic, and romantics ought to be monarchists, as they always have been."

"What about Victor Hugo?"

"Victor Hugo's different. I don't like him, he's a noisy fellow."

He often asked me what I was reading, and invariably scolded me for what he considered my bad choice of books.

"Gibbon's worse than Kostomarov, you should read Mommsen—he's a great bore, but he's very solid."

When he discovered that the first book I ever read was *Les Frères Zemganno*, he waxed quite indignant.

"There you are—a foolish novel! That's what spoilt you. There are three French writers—Stendhal, Balzac, and Flaubert—you may add Maupassant, but Chekhov's better. The Goncourts are mere clowns, they only pretend to be serious. They learned life from books written by inventors like themselves and they took it all seriously, but nobody needs their writing."

I did not agree with him, and this rather irritated L. N. He could not stand contradiction, and his arguments were sometimes strangely wilful.

"There's no such thing as degeneracy," he said. "It's all an invention of the Italian Lombroso, and the Jew Nordau echoed him like a parrot. Italy is a country of charlatans and adventurers—only people like Aretinos, Casanovas, Cagliostros are born there."

"What about Garibaldi?"

"That's politics, that's different."

When presented with one fact after another from the history of merchant families in Russia, he replied:

"It's not true, it all comes out of clever books. . . ."

I told him the story of three generations in a merchant family known to me—a story in which degeneracy acted with peculiar ruthlessness. Plucking at my sleeve in his agitation, he declared:

"That's true! That I know—there are two such families in Tula. That's what you ought to write about. A big novel in brief—d'you see what I mean? That's the way to do it!"

And his eyes gleamed avidly.

"But they'll all turn out knights, L. N."

"None of that! This is very serious. The one who becomes a monk to pray for the whole family

—that's marvellous. That's real life. You sin, and I'll go and redeem your sins. And the other—the bored grabber—that's true, too. And for him to drink and be a beast and a debauchee, and love everyone, and suddenly commit a murder—how good that is! That's what you ought to write about instead of searching for a hero among thieves and tramps. Heroes are lies, inventions, there's nothing but human beings, people—that's all!"

He often pointed out to me exaggerations which had crept into my stories, but once, speaking of the second part of *Dead Souls*, he said, smiling good-naturedly:

"We're all the most arrant romancers. I am, too. Sometimes one gets writing and all of a sudden one feels sorry for some character and starts giving him better attributes, or tones down another so that the first shall not seem too black in comparison."

And instantly, in the severe tones of an inexorable judge:

"And that's why I say art is lies, deceit, arbitrary stuff, harmful to humanity. You don't write about real life as it is, but about your own ideas of life, what you yourself think about

life. What good will it do anyone to know how I see that tower, or the sea, or that Tatar? Who wants to know that, what's the use of it?"

Sometimes his thoughts and feelings seemed to me mere whims, and even purposely distorted, but more often he would strike and subdue his listeners by the austere directness of his thoughts, like Job, the fearless interrogator of the cruel God.

He once said:

"I was walking along the Kiev high road in the end of May; the earth was paradise, everything rejoiced, the sky was cloudless, the birds sang, the bees hummed, the sun was kindly, and everything round me was festive, human, splendid. I was touched to tears and felt as if I were myself a bee roaming over the loveliest flowers in the world, and as if God were close to my soul. Suddenly what did I see? At the edge of the road, under some bushes, lay two pilgrims, a man and a woman, swarming over each other, both drab, filthy, old, wriggling like worms, mumbling and muttering, the sun mercilessly lighting up their bare, discoloured feet and decrepit bodies. I felt a pang at my heart. Oh, God, the

creator of beauty—aren't you ashamed of yourself? I felt very bad. . . .

"So you see the sort of things that happen! Nature—the Bogomiles* considered her the creation of Satan—torments man too harshly and mockingly, she takes away his strength, but leaves him his desires. This is true for all who have living souls. To man alone has it been given to feel the shame and horror of this torture—in the flesh bestowed upon him. We bear this within us like some inevitable punishment, and—for what sin?"

While speaking, the expression of his eyes changed in a very peculiar manner, sometimes becoming childishly plaintive, sometimes showing a harsh, dry gleam. His lips twitched and his moustache bristled. When he had finished speaking he took a handkerchief from the pocket of his smock and rubbed his face hard, although it was quite dry. Then he passed the hook-like fingers of his strong peasant hand through his beard and repeated softly:

"Yes, for what sin?"

I was walking along the lower road from Dyul-

* A religious sect in Bulgaria.— *Tr.*

ber to Ai-Todor with him one day. Striding lightly, like a young man, he said, displaying more agitation than was usual with him:

"The flesh should be a well-trained dog to the soul, going wherever the soul sends it. And look at us! The flesh is riotous and unresting, and the soul follows it in pitiable helplessness."

He rubbed his chest violently, just over his heart, raised his brows, and continued musingly:

"In Moscow, near the Sukharev Tower, I once saw—it was in autumn—a drunken wench. She lay there in the gutter. A stream of filthy water trickled out of a yard right under her neck and back, and there she lay in the cold water, muttering, tossing, wriggling about in the wet, unable to get up."

He shuddered, closed his eyes for a moment, shook his head and went on in low tones:

"Let's sit down here. There's nothing more horrible, more loathsome than a drunken female. I wanted to go and help her get up but I could not, I shrank from it. She was all slimy and wet, after touching her you wouldn't be able to get your hands clean for a month—ghastly! And on the kerb-stone near by sat a little grey-eyed,

fair-haired boy, tears running down his cheeks, sniffling, and bawling helplessly:

"'Ma-ma-a-a. . . . Get up. . . .'

"Every now and then she moved her arms, snorted, raised her head, and again—down it went into the dirt."

He fell silent and then, looking round him, repeated uneasily almost in a whisper:

"Ghastly, ghastly! Have you seen many drunken women? You have—oh, God! Don't write about it, you mustn't."

"Why not?"

Looking into my eyes and smiling, he echoed:

"Why not?"

Then he said, thoughtfully and slowly:

"I don't know. It's just that I—it seems shameful to write about beastliness. But after all—why not? One should write about everything. . . ."

Tears stood in his eyes. He wiped them away and, smiling all the time, looked at his handkerchief, while the tears trickled down his wrinkles again.

"I'm crying," he said. "I'm an old man, it makes my heart throb when I think of anything horrible."

And then, nudging me gently:

"You, too, will have lived your life, and everything will remain unaltered, and you will weep even more bitterly than I am weeping now, more 'drippily,' as peasant women say. . . . But everything must be written about, everything, or the little fair-haired boy will be hurt, he will reproach you—that's not the truth, he will say—not the whole truth."

He gave himself a thorough shake and said coaxingly:

"Come now, tell me something, you're a very good talker. Something about a child, about yourself. It's hard to believe you, too, were once a child, you're—such an odd chap. You seem to have been born grown-up. There's much that is childish, immature in your thoughts, and yet you know quite a lot about life—you don't need to know any more. Come, tell me something. . . ."

And he settled himself comfortably on the exposed roots of a pine-tree, watching the fuss and movement of ants in the grey pine needles.

Here, in the southern landscape, so strangely varied to the eye of a northerner, amidst all this luxurious, shamelessly voluptuous plant-life, sits Lev Tolstoi, his very name expressive of his

inner force!*—a small man, who is as gnarled and knotty as if he were of rugged, profoundly earthy roots. In the garish landscape of the Crimea, I repeat, he seemed to be at once in his right place, and out of place. A very ancient man, the master of the whole countryside, as it were—the master and maker, who after an absence of a hundred years is back in an economy which he himself has set up. There is much that he has forgotten, and much that is new to him; things are as they should be, but not quite, and he must find out at once what is not as it should be and why.

He would walk up and down the paths and roads with the rapid, hurried gait of an experienced globe-trotter, his keen eyes, from which not a stone, not a thought could escape, gazing, measuring, testing, comparing. And he scattered around him the living seed of his incessant thought. He said to Suler:

"You never read, Suler, and that's too bad, it's conceited, and Gorky here reads a great deal, and that's wrong, too—it's lack of confidence in himself. I write a lot and that's not right be-

* *Lev*, lion, *Tolstoi*, stout.—*Tr.*

cause I do it from senile vanity, from the desire to make everyone think as I do. Of course my way of thinking is right for myself, though Gorky thinks it's wrong for him, and you don't think at all, you just blink and look round for something to catch hold of. And you catch hold of things which have nothing to do with you—you've often done that. You catch hold and cling, and when the thing you are clinging to begins to fall away from you, you let go of it. Chekhov has a very good story—*The Darling* —you're rather like the woman in it."

"In what way?" laughed Suler.

"You're always ready to love, but you don't know how to select, and you fritter away your energy on trifles."

"Isn't everyone like that?"

"Everyone?" echoed L. N. "No, no—not everyone."

And suddenly he lashed out at me:

"Why don't you believe in God?"

"I have no faith, L. N."

"That's not true. You're a believer by nature, you can't get on without God. You'll soon begin to feel that. You don't believe because you're obstinate, and because you're annoyed—the

world isn't made the way you'd like it to be. Some people are unbelievers out of shyness. Young men are like that sometimes. They worship some woman, but can't bear to show it, they're afraid of being misunderstood, and besides they have no courage. Faith, like love, requires courage, daring. You must say to yourself: 'I believe,' and everything will be all right, everything will appear as you would like it to be; everything will explain itself to you, attract you. There is much that you love, for instance, and faith is simply the intensification of love, you must love still more, and love will turn to faith. It is always the best woman in the world that men love, and each one loves the best woman in the world and there you are—that's faith. An unbeliever cannot love. He falls in love with one today, and another in a year's time. The soul of such men is a tramp, it is sterile, and that's not right. You were born a believer and it's no use trying to go against your own nature. You are always saying—beauty. And what is beauty? The highest and most perfect is—God."

He had hardly ever talked to me about these things before and the importance of the subject,

its unexpectedness, took me unawares and almost overcame me. I said nothing. Seated on the sofa, his feet pushed beneath it, he allowed a triumphant smile to steal over his beard and said, shaking a finger at me:

"You can't get away from that by saying nothing, you know!"

And I, who do not believe in God, cast a stealthy, almost timid glance at him and said to myself:

"This man is like God."

SOPHIA TOLSTAYA

AFTER PUTTING down Mr. Chertkov's *Tolstoi's Retreat,* I told myself that someone would surely be found to write to the papers that the direct and sole purpose of this concoction is to blacken the memory of the late Sophia Andreyevna Tolstaya.

But so far I have not come across a single review drawing attention to this honourable purpose. I now learn that yet another book is to come out, written with the same laudable intention of convincing the educated section of society that Lev Tolstoi's wife was his evil spirit, and that her real name should have been Xanthippe. Obviously the confirmation of this "truth" is considered extremely important, indeed essential, especially, it seems to me, for those persons who live, spiritually and materially, on scandal.

Gamirov, a Nizhni-Novgorod tailor, used to say:

"A suit may be made so as to adorn a man, and it may be made so as to disfigure him."

The truth which adorns a human being is created by artists, all the other inhabitants can do no more than hastily, and as deftly as may be, concoct a "truth" for the disfigurement of one another. And I think we cavil at one another so indefatigably because man is the mirror of man.

I have never gone in for investigating the worth of those "truths" which, according to the ancient Russian custom, are inscribed in tar upon gates, but I feel impelled to say a few words about the only woman friend of the great Lev Tolstoi, as I see and understand her.

A person does not of course become any better just because he is dead. The fact that we speak of the dead no less basely and uncharitably than we do of the living is enough to prove this. Of the great, of those who at last come to the grave after having devoted to us their lives and the whole strength of their wonder-working souls, we invariably speak and write as if all we wanted was to assure ourselves that they, too, were miserable sinners like ourselves.

The transgression of an honest man, even if it be the most casual and trifling, rejoices us a great deal more than a disinterested or even a heroic act by a scoundrel, for we find it convenient and agreeable to regard the former as the fulfilment of an inexorable law, while the latter perturbs us — it is a miracle, running perilously counter to the accepted idea of a human being.

We invariably conceal our joy over the first instance by hypocritical expressions of regret, and, as hypocritically rejoicing over the second, we feel a secret fear: if scoundrels, damn them, were to become honest men — then what should we do?

It has justly been said that most of us are "shamefully indifferent to good and to evil," and desire to continue in the same to the end of our days; and so both good and evil in reality disturb our peace, and the more vivid their manifestation the more we are perturbed.

This pitiable anxiety of the poor in spirit may be observed also in our attitude to women. In literature, as in life, we cry boastfully: "The Russian woman is the best woman in the world!"

This cry always reminds me of the street-sellers, hawking prawns: "Prawns! All alive-o! Big prawns!"

The prawns are dropped alive into boiling water and, enriched by salt, pepper, and laurel leaf, boiled until they turn red. There is something akin to our treatment of the "best" woman in Europe in this procedure.

But having acknowledged the Russian woman to be the "best," we seem to have taken fright—what if, after all, she turns out to be better than we are? And whenever opportunity arises we plunge our women into the boiling cauldron of our greasy fatuity, never, by the way, forgetting to enrich the bouillon with two or three laurel leaves. It is well known that the more distinguished the woman, the more insistent our desire to make her blush.

The imps in hell might turn green with envy to see the jesuitical skill with which we are able to blacken one another.

After his death a man becomes neither better nor worse, but he ceases to interfere with us and, for once not strangers to gratitude, we reward the deceased by immediately consigning

him to oblivion, which is undoubtedly the best we can do for him. It seems to me that the best thing we can do for those, both living and dead, who quite unnecessarily worry us with their aspirations to make people better, life more humane, is to forget them.

But this good custom of forgetting the dead is not seldom infringed by our petty rancours, our miserable greed for revenge, and the hypocrisy of our moral code; and the attitude to the late Sophia Andreyevna is a striking example of this.

I believe I can speak of her with entire impartiality, since I never liked her, and did not enjoy her regard, a fact which she, being a very frank person, did not conceal from me. There was often something offensive in her attitude to me, but I did not take offence, knowing that she regarded most of the people, who surrounded the great martyr who was her husband, as flies, gnats, in a word—parasites.

It is quite possible that her jealousy sometimes grieved Lev Tolstoi. Certain wits will not fail to recall here the fable of the bear which, in its solicitude for the man who lay down under a tree to sleep, chivied away the flies buzzing

round him and brought his heavy paw down with a blow that killed the sleeper.* It would, however, be at once more appropriate and wiser if they were to recall the density and dimensions of the cloud of flies which buzzed around the great writer, and the nuisance some of these parasites feeding on his soul were. Each insect endeavoured to leave its trace on the life and memory of Tolstoi, and amongst them were some so persistent that they would have evoked the hatred of a St. Francis of Assisi. And the hostility towards them felt by a passionate woman like Sophia Andreyevna was perfectly natural. Lev Tolstoi himself, like all great artists, was extremely indulgent to his fellow creatures. He had his own, highly original, appraisals of others which frequently failed to coincide with those laid down by accepted morals. In his diary for 1882 he wrote of a certain acquaintance of his: "If it were not for his love of dogs he would be an arrant scoundrel."

* This story, used by the famous poet Krylov in his rhymed fable, is so popular in Russia that the term "to do someone a bear's service" has become a part of everyday speech, much more vivid than the English "to bestow a doubtful blessing."— *Tr.*

As far back as the eighties, his wife had become convinced that the intimacy of certain of the herd of admirers and "apostles" brought him nothing but unpleasantness and vexation. Of course she knew all about the disgraceful and grievous dramas in the "Tolstoian" colonies, such as, for example, that which occurred in Arkhangelsky's Simbirsk Colony, ending in the suicide of a peasant girl, and soon finding echo in Karonin's notorious story *The Borskaya Colony*.

She knew of the disgusting public "exposals of the hypocrisy of Count Tolstoi," sponsored by renegade Tolstoians, such as Ilyin, the author of the hysterically vicious *Diary of a Tolstoian*; she had read the articles of Novosyolov, a former apostle of Lev Tolstoi and the organizer of a colony, articles which came out in the *Pravoslavnoye Obozreniye* (*Orthodox Review*), the organ of the church militant, which was as orthodox as a police station.

She probably knew, too, of the lecture on Tolstoi by Professor Gusev of the Kazan Ecclesiastical Academy, who was one of the most persistent exposers of the "heresies of the self-enamoured Count Tolstoi." This professor in his

lecture declared, among other things, that he had made use of information on the domestic life of the "Yasnaya Polyana pseudo-sage," furnished by individuals who had been fascinated by his chaotic heresies.

Among these enthusiastic admirers of the teachings of her husband she saw Menshikov, who, cramming his book *On Love* with the ideas of Tolstoi, became rapidly transformed into a morose fanatic and began contributing to *Novoye Vremya* (*New Times*), where he was one of the most prominent of the misanthropists who expended their talents so noisily in this corrupt paper.

She had seen many such people, including the self-taught poet Bulgakov, made much of by Tolstoi. Lev Tolstoi printed his mediocre verses in *Russkaya Mysl* (*Russian Thought*), and the semi-literate, sick, morbidly sensitive poetaster showed his gratitude by writing a filthy article entitled "At Tolstoi's. An Open Letter to Lev Nikolayevich." This article was so crude, false and illiterate that no one could be found to print it. The manuscript even came back from the editorial office of *Moskovskiye Vedomosti* (*Moscow News*), with the comment on the margin: "Rejected owing to excessive indelicacy."

The manuscript thus inscribed was sent by Bulgakov to Tolstoi, with the demand that he should publish "the truth about himself."

The incident of the notorious "Tolstoian," Boulanger, undoubtedly caused Sophia Andreyevna no little suffering, and all these incidents, of course, by no means exhausted the coarseness, hypocrisy and self-interest which she saw in people supposed to be "adherents" of Lev Tolstoi.

Her keen mistrust of the admirers and followers of her husband is therefore perfectly comprehensible, and the facts thoroughly justify her endeavours to chivy away parasites from a man who was a creative giant, and of whose agonized spiritual struggles she was a most comprehending witness. There can be no doubt whatever that, thanks to her, Lev Tolstoi was spared many blows from the hooves of asses, and that a great deal of mud and spittle did not touch him.

It should not be forgotten that almost every idler who could read and write in the eighties considered himself in duty bound to expose the religious, philosophical, social and other errors of the world's great genius. These exposures even reached the "simple-hearted"—who can for-

get the dear old lady who added fuel to the fire beneath the martyred Jan Hus?

I can see, as if it were only yesterday, Malomerkov the confectioner, standing at a cauldron of boiling syrup for caramels, and can plainly hear the thoughtful words of the creator of sweets and cakes:

"If only I could boil that heretical viper, Tolstoi. . . ."

A Tsaritsyn barber wrote a work entitled, if I am not mistaken, *Count Tolstoi and the Holy Prophets*. And a local priest inscribed in a flourishing hand on the first page of the manuscript, in violet ink, the words:

"I thoroughly approve of this work, with qualifications as to certain coarse expressions of wrath in it, which, however, are by no means unjustifiable."

A friend of mine, the telegraph operator Yurin, a clever hunchback, got the manuscript from the author for us to read, and I was stunned by the savage rancour of the barber against the author of *Polikushka*, *The Cossacks*, *What I Believe In*, and, I think, *The Tale of Three Brothers*—works which I had just read for the first time. There was a lame ancient, a Cossack from Log, who

roved the *stanitsas* of the Don country, the stations of the Gryazi-Tsaritsyn and Volga-Don railways, announcing that "Count Tolstoi is raising a revolt in the Moscow district against religion and the tsar," and had taken the land away from certain peasants and given it to "certain post-office officials who were his relatives."

The echoes of this ignorant clamour, evoked by the loud voice of the uneasy soul of genius, must surely have reached Yasnaya Polyana, but this was not the only thing that must have made the eighties the most difficult period in the life of Sophia Andreyevna. I regard the role played by her during this period as little short of heroic. She must have possessed a great deal of spiritual force and vigilance to have shielded Lev Tolstoi from so much that was evil and trivial, so much that neither he nor anybody else needed to know, and that might have influenced his attitude to others.

The best way to kill slander and evil is by silence.

If we regard the lives of teachers with an impartial eye we shall see that it is not only they, as is generally supposed, who spoil their pupils, but also the pupils themselves who compromise

the character of their teachers—some from stupidity, others from defiance, and yet others by assimilating their teachings in a ludicrous manner. Lev Tolstoi was not always quite indifferent to the appraisals of his life and work.

Lastly, his wife no doubt never forgot that Tolstoi lived in a country where anything could happen, and where the Government could imprison its subjects without trial and keep them in prison for twenty years. The "heretical" priest Zolotnitsky actually languished for thirty years in the Suzdal monastery prison, and was only liberated after his reason had completely forsaken him.

The artist does not seek for truth, he creates it.

I do not believe that Lev Tolstoi was satisfied by the truth he preached. Two fundamental types of mind dwelt in him, probably in agonized conflict—the creative mind of the artist and the sceptical mind of the investigator. The author of *War and Peace* may have thought out and offered to the world his religious doctrines simply to prevent people from interfering with his intensive and exacting work as an artist. It is quite possible that Tolstoi the brilliant artist

regarded Tolstoi the preacher with an indulgent smile, a mocking shake of the head. In his *Diary of Youth* may be found frank indications of his hostile attitude to analytical thought. An entry for March 22, 1852, contains the words:

"A very great number of thoughts can exist simultaneously, especially when the head is empty."

Evidently, even at that early date, "thoughts" stood in the way of that artistic creation for which his heart and mind clamoured. It is only in this revolt of "thoughts" against his unconscious yearning for art, only in this struggle for ascendancy between these two elemental forces in him that we can seek the explanation of the following words:

". . . consciousness is the greatest of all the evils by which man has ever been beset."

In a letter to Arsenyeva he said:

"Intelligence, if it is too great, is detestable."

But "thoughts" overpowered him, compelling him to gather them up, and combine them into some kind of philosophical system. For thirty years he strove to achieve this, and we have seen how it led the great artist to a negation of art itself, although art was undoubtedly the very backbone of his spirit.

Only a few days before his death, he wrote: "Felt vividly the sin and temptation of writing—condemned it in others, and justly applied the condemnation to myself."

There has never been such a sad case in the history of humanity; at least I do not remember any other great artist who came to the conviction that art, that most beautiful of man's achievements, was sinful.

To put it briefly: Lev Tolstoi was the most complex individual amongst all the greatest men of the nineteenth century. The role of his only close friend, his wife, the mother of his numerous children, and the mistress of his home, was undoubtedly at once onerous and responsible. It will scarcely be denied that Sophia Andreyevna saw and felt, with greater depth and discernment than anyone else, how hard it was for genius to breathe the close, cramped atmosphere of ordinary life, to be in contact with shallow persons. At the same time, however, she could not fail to see and understand that the great artist was truly great when he could work in secret and with divine skill at his soul's task, whereas when he played preference—and lost—he would lose his temper like any other mortal,

sometimes even giving way to unreasonable anger, ascribing his errors to his partner, just as ordinary people do, and no doubt she herself did.

Sophia Andreyevna was not the only one who could not understand why the great novelist should plough the soil, build stoves, make boots. Many of Tolstoi's greatest contemporaries failed to understand this, too. But they merely enjoyed the wonder of it, whereas other emotions were forced upon Sophia Andreyevna. No doubt she remembered that one of the Russian expounders of nihilism, the author of an interesting work on Apollonius of Tyana, declared:

"Boots are greater than Shakespeare."

Sophia Andreyevna must have grieved infinitely more than anyone else over the unexpected community of views of the author of *War and Peace* and the prophet of nihilism.

Not everyone is capable of understanding and appreciating the anxieties of life with an author who insisted on seven sets of proofs, rewriting the whole at every fresh reading, himself in torture and torturing others, of life with the creator of a whole vast world, brought into being by himself.

Nobody knows what Lev Tolstoi's wife said to him, nor how she expressed herself when, alone with him, she first heard the freshly written chapters of his book. While not for a moment forgetting the extraordinary perspicuity of genius, I cannot help thinking that certain features of the feminine characters in his stupendous novel are such as only a woman could have known, and may have been suggested by her to the novelist.

As if purposely to make the intricate web of life still more complex we are all born teachers of one another. I have yet to meet a man absolutely free from the officious desire to teach his neighbour. And though I am told this vice is essential for the purposes of social evolution I remain true to the conviction that social evolution would develop a great deal more quickly and in a more humane way, and that people would be much less conventional, if they taught less and learned more.

Analytical "thoughts" got a grip on the great heart of Lev Tolstoi the artist, and finally compelled him to undertake the onerous and ungrateful role of a "teacher of life." The deleterious influence of this role on the work of the artist

has frequently been pointed out. In my opinion the "philosophy" would have preponderated still more over the artistry in Tolstoi's great historical novel but for the feminine influence which can be felt throughout. It may be that it was due to a woman's suggestion that the philosophical section of *War and Peace* was consigned to the end of the book, where it could not have any influence on anything or anyone.

It must be placed to the credit of women that while giving birth to philosophers they have never cared for philosophy. Art itself comprises plenty of philosophy. The artist possessing the faculty of clothing naked thought in beautiful images, skilfully conceals the pitiful impotence of philosophy when confronted by any of the obscure enigmas of life. Children are always given bitter pills in pretty wrappings—and this is both wise and merciful.

The reason that Sabaoth created the world so ill, is that he was a bachelor. This is more than an atheist's quip, the words express unshakeable confidence in the importance of woman as the stimulus to art and the harmonizer of life. The old legend of Adam's fall still

retains a profound meaning—the world owes all its happiness to the eager curiosity of woman. Its misfortunes are due to the collective folly of mankind, including that of women.

"Love and hunger rule the world"—this is the truest and most appropriate motto for the infinite history of man's sufferings. But where love rules, we, so recently wild beasts, have culture, art and all that is great, of which we are so justly proud. Where the stimulus to our action is hunger, we have civilization and all the misfortunes following in its train, all the burdens and limitations which are so necessary to creatures so recently wild beasts. The most terrible aspect of stupidity is greed—a zoological quality. If people were not so greedy they would not be so hungry, they would be wiser. This is no paradox. After all, it is quite clear—if we could learn to share our superfluities, which at present only make life more burdensome, the world would be happier, its inhabitants more rational. But it is only artists and scientists who give the world all the treasures of their souls, and who, like everyone else furnishing food for worms after their death, in their lifetime serve as food for the critics and mor-

alists sticking to their skins as lichen sticks to the bark of fruit-trees.

The role of the snake in the Garden of Eden was played by Eros, to whom Lev Tolstoi readily submitted and whom he ardently served. I have not forgotten who was the author of the *Kreutzer Sonata*, but I can remember, also, how A. P. Bolshakov, the seventy-two-year-old Nizhni-Novgorod merchant, watching the schoolgirls in the street from his window, said, with a sigh:

"Oh, why did I grow old so early? Look at all those young ladies, they're no good to me, and only make me cross and envious!"

I am confident that I shall not be blackening the vivid image of the great writer by saying that just such a natural and legitimate fury can be felt in the *Kreutzer Sonata*. Lev Tolstoi himself complained of the shameless irony of nature which, taking away our strength, yet leaves us our desires.

It should be borne in mind that, despite the passionate nature of the artist, Sophia Andreyevna was the only woman in his life for almost fifty years. She was his close, faithful, and I think, his only real friend. In the generosity of

his great soul Lev Tolstoi called many people his friends, but these were in reality merely people who sympathized with his ideas. It will be agreed that it would be hard to think of anyone truly worthy of being the friend of Tolstoi.

The very fact of her uninterrupted and prolonged union with Tolstoi entitled Sophia Andreyevna to the respect of all admirers, both true and false, of the work and memory of the genius. For this alone the esteemed investigators of Tolstoi's "domestic tragedy" should be content to curb their evil tongues, to forget their narrow personal feelings of offence and revenge, and refrain both from those "psychological searchings" of theirs, resembling the dirty work done by detectives, and from their insolent and cynical endeavours to touch the life of the great writer, if only with their finger-tips.

In my reminiscences of the happy days when I had the great honour of acquaintance with Lev Tolstoi, I purposely said nothing about Sophia Andreyevna. I never liked her. I sensed in her a jealous, strained, painfully tense desire to emphasize her own role in the life of her husband, a role indubitably great. She reminded me a

little of a man showing an old lion at a country circus, purposely terrifying the audience with a display of the beast's strength, in order to demonstrate that he, the tamer, is the only person in the world whom the lion loves and obeys. To my thinking such demonstrations, entirely superfluous on the part of Sophia Andreyevna, were sometimes even comic and lowering to her dignity. Moreover, there was no need for her to emphasize her role, since at that time there was no one among those who surrounded Lev Tolstoi who could be compared, for brains and energy, with his wife. Now, having seen and realized the attitude to her of people like Chertkov, I consider that even her jealousy of outsiders, her obvious desire to come between them and her husband, and certain other disagreeable traits in her, were all called into being and justified by the treatment of Tolstoi's wife both during his lifetime and after his death.

I observed Sophia Andreyevna for several months at Gaspra in the Crimea, when Tolstoi was so dangerously ill that the Government, in daily expectation of his death, sent a notary from Simferopol, and the official settled down at Yalta ready, it was said, to confiscate the

writer's papers. The estate of Countess S. Panina, where the Tolstois were living, was surrounded by detectives, who strolled about the park, until Leopold Sulerzhitsky chivied them away as if they were pigs in a vegetable plot. Some of Tolstoi's manuscripts had already been secretly transferred to Yalta and hidden there by Sulerzhitsky.

If I am not mistaken, the whole Tolstoi family was gathered together at Gaspra—children, sons-in-law, daughters-in-law. I got an impression of a great number of helpless, sick people. I could see clearly that Sophia Andreyevna had been sucked into the centre of a whirlpool, absorbed into "life's daily grind," while endeavouring to preserve the invalid's peace and his manuscripts, to see that the children were comfortable, to fend off the noisy officiousness of "sincerely sympathizing" visitors and professional onlookers, to see that everyone was fed. Then sh had to soothe the jealousy of the doctors, each of whom was convinced that the great service of healing the patient was his own special prerogative.

Without the least exaggeration it may be said that in these sad days, as always in a time of

misfortune, vast quantities of rubbish—petty squabbles, disquieting trifles—were blown into the house on the ill wind of vulgarity. Lev Tolstoi was nothing like so rich as was supposed, he was a writer supporting by his earnings a host of offspring who, though sufficiently adult, were incapable of working. Sophia Andreyevna struggled from morning till night in the blinding dust of all these petty affairs, her teeth set, her intelligent eyes narrowed, astonishing everyone by her ability to get everything done in time, to placate everyone, to put a stop to the whinings of small-minded individuals at odds with one another.

The anaemic wife of Andrei Tolstoi went about in a daze—she was pregnant, and, having stumbled, feared a miscarriage. Tatyana Tolstaya's husband—he had a weak heart—gasped and wheezed. Sergei Tolstoi, a harmless, colourless individual of forty, vainly and dejectedly sought partners for a game of preference. He had tried his hand at musical composition and once played the pianist A. Goldenweiser a song of his to the words of Tyutchev—"Of what do you moan, O wind of night?" I don't remember what Goldenweiser's opinion of this music was, but Dr.

A. N. Aleksin, who had had a musical education, found in the music of Sergei Tolstoi undoubted traces of the influence of the French chansonnettes.

I repeat I got a strange, and perhaps a false, impression that all the members of the vast Tolstoi family were sick people, that they disliked one another, that they were all bored. True, Alexandra Tolstaya's attack of dysentery occurred after her father had recovered. And Sophia Andreyevna had to see to them all, to avert everything likely to have an unpleasant and injurious effect on the great writer quietly preparing to depart from life.

I remember the trouble Sophia Andreyevna took to prevent an issue of *Novoye Vremya* with a story in it by Lev Tolstoi junior, and a critical article on him by V. P. Burenin, from falling into her husband's hands.

Lev Lvovich published some stories in the same paper in which the caustic Burenin made laborious fun of him, dubbing him Tigr Tigrovich Soskin-Mladentsev (Tiger, son of the Tiger, Milksop-Pup).* In his heavy-handed hu-

* The name and patronymic of Tolstoi's son were Lev Lvovich, literally Lion, son of the Lion.—*Tr.*

mour Burenin even went so far as to give the unhappy author's address: Mad-house.

Lev Tolstoi, *fils*, was greatly exercised lest he should be suspected of imitating his great father, and, apparently to prevent this, published a thrilling "anti-Tolstoian" novel on the usefulness of bismuth and the injuriousness of arsenic in Yasinsky's shabby *Yezhemesyachniye Sochineniya* (*Monthly Writings*). This is quite serious—such was the purpose of the novel. And in the same issue of this magazine Yasinsky published a scurrilous review of Tolstoi's *Resurrection*, in which the reviewer saw fit to comment also on those chapters of the novel banned in the Russian edition, and only printed in the Berlin edition, which appeared earlier than the Russian. Sophia Andreyevna correctly appraised this review as a denunciation.

I mention all this very reluctantly, and only because I consider it necessary to point out once again the extraordinary complexity of the conditions in which Sophia Andreyevna lived, and the brains and tact they demanded of her. Like all great men Lev Tolstoi lived in the open, and every passer-by considered it his inalienable privilege to make some sort of contact with this

strange, eccentric man. There can be no doubt that Sophia Andreyevna kept many soiled and greedy hands at a distance, brushed away many callously inquisitive fingers desirous of coarsely plumbing the spiritual wounds of the rebellious man so dear to her.

Sophia Andreyevna's behaviour during the days of the agrarian revolution (1905-06) has always been regarded as particularly blameworthy. It has been established that she acted during those days just like hundreds of other Russian landed proprietors, who hired bands of ignorant and violent men for the "protection of Russian agriculture against savages." It appears she hired Caucasian mountain dwellers for the defence of Yasnaya Polyana.

It has been pointed out that the wife of Lev Tolstoi, who himself denied the right to property, should not have prevented the peasants from looting his estate. But it was her duty to guard the life and peace of Lev Tolstoi while he lived at Yasnaya Polyana itself, the place which provided him with the peace his soul required. Quiet was the more essential to him since he was already coming to the end of his

S. A. TOLSTAYA

From a portrait by V. Serov

strength, getting ready to depart from life. He left Yasnaya Polyana only five years after this period.

Knowing folk may find in my words an obvious hint: Lev Tolstoi, revolutionary and anarchist, should have left his estate, or would have done better to have left it during the 1905 Revolution. Of course, no such hint is intended—I always say outright whatever I want to say.

In my opinion Lev Nikolayevich Tolstoi should never have gone away, and those who helped him to do this would have been wiser to prevent it. That Tolstoi's "departure" shortened his life, every minute of which was precious, is an incontrovertible fact.

It has been said that Tolstoi was driven out of his house by his mentally diseased wife. But I should like to know which of the people surrounding Lev Tolstoi in those days was perfectly sane. And I cannot understand why, if they considered his wife to be insane, the sane ones did not think of procuring the necessary attention for her, and having her isolated.

Honest Leopold Sulerzhitsky, a genuine hater of property, an anarchist by nature, and not by

teaching, disliked Sophia Andreyevna. And yet this is how he described her behaviour during the years 1905 and 1906:

"The Tolstoi family can hardly have enjoyed the spectacle of peasants gradually appropriating the property of Yasnaya Polyana, and felling the birch copse planted by Tolstoi himself. I think even he regretted the copse. This natural, if unspoken, grief and regret compelled Sophia Andreyevna to do what she knew she would be blamed for. She was much too clever a woman not to have known this and taken it into consideration. But everyone was so sad, and no one ventured to resist. So *she* did. I respect her for it. I shall go to Yasnaya Polyana one of these days and say to her: 'I respect you.' I even believe she may have been silently forced to do it. But all this is unimportant, so long as Tolstoi himself is all right."

My knowledge of human nature assures me that Sulerzhitsky's surmise was correct. No one will venture to affirm that Lev Tolstoi was insincere in his denial of the right to property, but I am nevertheless convinced that he really did regret the copse. He had planted it with his own hands, it was his very own work. Here arises a slight

conflict between his deep-rooted instincts, hostile as he was to them, and his reason.

I add: we are living in years of unprecedented scope, when a bold experiment is being made to destroy private property in land and the implements of labour, and, as we now see, by the irony of fate, that base, accursed instinct is growing and increasing in strength, even corrupting and making criminals of honest people.

Lev Tolstoi was a great man, and the fact that nothing human was alien to him by no means darkens his bright image. Nor does this bring him down to our own level. It would be psychologically perfectly natural for great artists to be greater in their sins than the common ruck of sinners. In some cases we see that this is so.

And after all—what is it all about?

... Simply a woman, after fifty difficult years of life with a great artist, an extraordinary and restless human being, a woman who was his only true friend throughout his whole life, and his active assistant in his work, is overcome by terrible exhaustion—a perfectly comprehensible fact.

At the same time, this woman, grown old, and seeing that this stupendous individual, her husband, is not long for this world, realizes indignantly that she is lonely and forsaken.

In her indignation at finding herself driven away from the position she had occupied for fifty years, Sophia Andreyevna, it is said, did not behave with due consideration for the moral restrictions set up by narrow-minded and ignorant folk.

In time her indignation assumed the character of something like madness.

Still later, abandoned by all, she died a solitary death, and if anyone remembered her it was only for the purpose of joyfully vilifying her.

That is all.

In Volume 4 of *Red Archives* there is an extremely interesting article entitled "The Last Days of Lev Tolstoi." Among other things it contains the report of Police General Lvov, in which we read:

"Andrei Tolstoi, in conversation with Captain Savitsky, declared that the isolation of Tolstoi from his family, from his wife in particular, was

the result of pressure brought by Chertkov on the doctors and Tolstoi's daughter Alexandra."

And further on:

"From words dropped here and there it may be concluded that Tolstoi's family were not admitted to the patient owing to causes having no direct bearing on the state of his health."

ANTON CHEKHOV

He once invited me to visit him in the village of Kuchuk-Koi, where he had a tiny plot of ground and a white, two-storey house. He showed me over his "estate," talking animatedly all the time:

"If I had lots of money I would build a sanatorium here for sick village teachers. A building full of light, you know, very light, with big windows and high ceilings. I'd have a splendid library, all sorts of musical instruments, an apiary, a vegetable garden, an orchard. I'd have lectures on agronomy, meteorology, and so on—teachers ought to know everything, old man—everything!"

He broke off suddenly, coughed, cast an oblique glance at me, and smiled his sweet, gentle smile, a smile which had an irresistible charm,

forcing one to follow his words with the keenest attention.

"Does it bore you to listen to my dreams? I love talking about this. If you only knew the absolute necessity for the Russian countryside of good, clever, educated teachers! In Russia we have simply got to create exceptional conditions for teachers, and that as soon as possible, since we realize that unless the people get an all-round education the State will collapse like a house built from insufficiently baked bricks. The teacher must be an actor, an artist, passionately in love with his work, and our teachers are navvies, half-educated individuals, who go to the village to teach children about as willingly as they would go to exile. They are famished, downtrodden, they live in perpetual fear of losing their livelihood. And the teacher ought to be the first man in the village, able to answer all the questions put to him by the peasants, to instil in the peasants a respect for his power, worthy of attention and respect, whom no one will dare to shout at . . . to lower his dignity, as in our country everybody does—the village policeman, the rich shopkeeper, the priest, the school patron, the elder and that official who, though he

is called a school inspector, busies himself, not over the improvement of conditions for education, but simply and solely over the carrying out to the letter of district circulars. It's absurd to pay a niggardly pittance to one who is called upon to educate the people—to educate the people, mind! It is intolerable that such a one should go about in rags, shiver in a damp, dilapidated school, be poisoned by fumes from badly ventilated stoves, be always catching cold, and by the age of thirty be a mass of disease—laryngitis, rheumatism, tuberculosis! It's a disgrace to us! For nine or ten months in the year our teachers live the lives of hermits, without a soul to speak to, they grow stupid from loneliness, without books or amusements. And if they venture to invite friends to come and see them, people think they are disaffected—that idiotic word with which cunning folk terrify fools. . . . All this is disgusting . . . a kind of mockery of human beings doing a great and terribly important work. I tell you, when I meet a teacher I feel quite awkward in front of him—for his timidity, and for his shabbiness. I feel as if I myself were somehow to blame for the teacher's wretched state—I do, really!"

Pausing for a moment, he threw out his arm and said softly:

"What an absurd, clumsy country our Russia is!"

A shadow of profound sorrow darkened his beautiful eyes, and a fine network of wrinkles showed at the corners, deepening his glance. He looked around him and began making fun of himself.

"There you are—I've treated you to a full-length leading article for a liberal newspaper. Come on, I'll give you some tea as a reward for your patience. . . ."

This was often the way with him. One moment he would be talking with warmth, gravity and sincerity, and the next, he would be laughing at himself and his own words. And beneath this gentle, sorrowful laughter could be felt the subtle scepticism of a man who knew the value of words, the value of dreams. As well as this, there was a shade of his attractive modesty, his intuitive delicacy in this laughter, too.

We walked back to the house in silence. It was a warm, bright day; the sound of waves, sparkling in the vivid rays of the sun, could be heard. In the valley, a dog was squealing its

delight about something. Chekhov took me by the arm and said slowly, his speech interrupted by coughs:

"It's disgraceful and very sad, but it is true—there are many people who envy dogs. . . ."

And then he added, laughing:

"Everything I say today sounds senile—I must be getting old."

Again and again I would hear from him:

"Listen—a teacher has just arrived . . . he's ill, he has a wife—you couldn't do anything for him, could you? I've fixed him up for the moment. . . ."

Or:

"Listen, Gorky! A teacher wants to meet you. He is bed-ridden, sick. Won't you go to see him?"

Or:

"There's a schoolmistress asking for books to be sent. . . ."

Sometimes I would find this "teacher" in his house—usually a teacher, flushed with the consciousness of his own awkwardness, sitting on the edge of a chair, sweating and picking his words, trying to speak as smoothly and "educatedly" as he could, or, with the over-familiarity of a morbidly shy individual, entirely absorbed

in the desire not to appear stupid in the eyes of the writer, showering Anton Pavlovich with questions that had probably only just come into his head.

Anton Pavlovich would listen attentively to the clumsy speech; and a smile would light up his mournful eyes, setting the wrinkles on his temples in play, and in his deep, gentle, hushed voice, he would begin speaking, using simple, clear words, words close to life, which immediately put his visitor at ease, so that he stopped trying to be clever and consequently became both cleverer and more interesting. . . .

I remember one of these teachers—tall, lean, with a sallow, emaciated face and a long, hooked nose drooping mournfully towards his chin—he sat opposite Anton Pavlovich, gazing steadily into his face with his black eyes, and droning on in a morose bass:

"Impressions of this sort gathered from living conditions throughout the period of the pedagogical season accumulate in a psychic conglomerate which entirely eliminates the slightest possibility of an objective attitude to the world around. The world is, of course, nothing but our own conception of it. . . ."

Here he embarked upon philosophical ground, slipping about like a drunk man on ice.

"Tell me," asked Chekhov, quietly and kindly, "who is it that beats the children in your district?"

The teacher leaped from his chair and began waving his arms indignantly.

"What? Me? Never! *Beat* them?"

And he snorted offendedly.

"Don't get upset," continued Anton Pavlovich, smiling to pacify him. "Did I say it was you? But I remember reading in the paper that there was someone who beat the school children in your district. . . ."

The teacher sat down again, mopped his perspiring countenance, and sighed in relief, saying in his deep bass:

"Quite right. There was a case. It was Makarov. And no wonder! It's fantastic, but it is understandable. He's married, has four children, his wife is ill, he is, too—consumptive—his salary is twenty rubles . . . and the school's like a cellar, with only one room for the teacher. In such circumstances one would cuff an angel from heaven for the slightest misdemeanour, and the pupils are far from angels, believe me!"

And this man, who had the moment before been trying to impress Chekhov by his stock of grand words, suddenly, wagging his hooked nose ominously, came out with words like stones, simple and heavy, words which threw a bright light on the accursed, sinister truth of the life going on in the Russian village. . . .

When taking leave of his host the teacher pressed Chekhov's small, dry-skinned hand with its slender fingers in both of his.

"I went to see you as if I were going to see a superior," he said, "shaking in my shoes. I swelled like a turkey-cock, determined to show you that I was worth something too, and I go away as if I were leaving a good, close friend, who understands everything. What a great thing it is—to understand everything! Thank you! I'm going. I take away with me a good, precious thought: great people are simpler, they understand more, they are closer to us poor mortals than the small fry we live amidst. Good-bye, I shall never forget you."

His nose quivered, his lips relaxed in a nice smile, and he added unexpectedly:

"Bad people are unfortunate, too—damn them!"

When he had gone Anton Pavlovich, following him with his eyes, smiled, and said: "Nice chap. He won't be teaching long, though."

"Why not?"

"They'll hound him out . . . get rid of him."

After a pause he added, in low, gentle tones:

"In Russia an honest man is something like a chimney-sweep for nurses to frighten little children with. . . ."

It seems to me that in the presence of Anton Pavlovich everyone felt an unconscious desire to be simpler, more truthful, more himself, and I had many opportunities of observing how people threw off their attire of grand bookish phrases, fashionable expressions, and all the rest of the cheap trifles with which Russians, in their anxiety to appear Europeans, adorn themselves, as savages deck themselves with shells and fishes' teeth. Anton Pavlovich was not fond of fishes' teeth and cocks' feathers; all that is tawdry, tinkling, alien, donned by human beings for the sake of an "imposing appearance," embarrassed him, and I noticed that whenever he met with one of these dressed-up individuals he felt an overmastering impulse

to free him from his ponderous and superfluous trappings, distorting the true face and living soul of his interlocutor. All his life Anton Pavlovich lived the life of the soul, was always himself, inwardly free, and took no notice of what some expected and others—less delicate—demanded of Anton Chekhov. He did not like conversations on "lofty" subjects—conversations which Russians, in the simplicity of their hearts, find so amusing, forgetting that it is absurd, and not in the least witty, to talk about the velvet apparel of the future, while not even possessing in the present a decent pair of trousers.

Of a beautiful simplicity himself, he loved all that was simple, real, sincere, and he had a way of his own of making others simple.

He was once visited by three extremely dressy ladies. Filling his room with the rustle of silk petticoats and the fragrance of heady perfumes, they seated themselves pompously opposite their host and, feigning an intense interest in politics, began "putting questions" to him.

"How do you think the war will end, Anton Pavlovich?"

Anton Pavlovich coughed, paused for thought and replied in his soft, grave, kindly voice:

"No doubt in peace."

"That, of course. But who will win? The Greeks or the Turks?"

"It seems to me that the stronger side will win."

"And which do you consider the stronger side?" the ladies asked in one voice.

"The side which is better fed and better educated."

"Isn't he witty?" cried one of the ladies.

"And which do you prefer—the Greeks or the Turks?" asked another.

Anton Pavlovich looked at her kindly and replied with his meek, courteous smile:

"I like fruit pastilles—do you?"

"Oh, yes!" cried the lady eagerly.

"They have such a delicious taste," corroborated the other gravely.

And all three began an animated conversation about fruit pastilles, displaying marvellous erudition and intricate knowledge of the subject. They were obviously delighted not to have to tax their brains and pretend a serious interest in Turks and Greeks, to whom till the present moment they had never given a thought.

On leaving, they promised Anton Pavlovich gaily:

A. P. Chekhov and A. M. Gorky

The Crimea, 1900

"We're going to send you a box of fruit pastilles."

"You had a nice talk," I remarked, when they had gone.

Anton Pavlovich laughed softly.

"Everyone ought to speak in his own language," he said.

Another time I found a good-looking young prosecuting magistrate in his room. Standing in front of Chekhov, tossing back his curly head, he was saying in confident tones:

"In your *Miscreant* you confront me with an extremely complex problem, Anton Pavlovich. If I recognize in Denis Grigoryev the existence of a deliberate will to evil, it is my duty to commit Denis to gaol unhesitatingly, since the interests of society demand it. But he is a savage, he is unconscious of the criminality of his act, I am sorry for him. If I regard him as a subject acting irrationally and yield to feelings of pity, how am I to guarantee society that Denis will not again unscrew the bolts and derail the train? That is the question? What is to be done?"

He paused, throwing himself back in his chair and fixing a searching glance on the face of Anton Pavlovich. His uniform was brand new, and

the buttons down the front of it gleamed as confidently and stupidly as the eyes in the freshly-washed countenance of the youthful zealot.

"If I were the judge," said Anton Pavlovich gravely, "I would have acquitted Denis."

"On what grounds?"

"I would have said to him: 'You haven't grown into a type of the conscious criminal yet, Denis, go and do so.'"

The lawyer laughed, but immediately recovered his portentous gravity and continued:

"No, esteemed Anton Pavlovich, the problem you have raised can only be solved in the interests of society, the life and property of which I am called upon to protect. Denis is a savage, it is true, but he is a criminal, and therein lies the truth."

"Do you like listening to the gramophone?" asked Anton Pavlovich suddenly.

"Oh, yes! Very much. It's a marvellous invention," the youth hastened to reply.

"And I can't bear the gramophone," admitted Anton Pavlovich sorrowfully.

"Why not?"

"Oh well, it talks and sings, without feeling anything. All the sounds coming from it are so

empty and lifeless. And do you go in for photography?"

The lawyer turned out to be a passionate admirer of photography. He began immediately to speak about it with enthusiasm, no longer taking the slightest interest in the gramophone, despite his own likeness to that "marvellous invention," which Chekhov had noticed with such subtlety and precision. Once again I saw beneath the uniform a lively and not uninteresting human being, one who was still as young in the ways of life as a puppy taken hunting.

After seeing the young man out, Anton Pavlovich said morosely:

"And it's pimples like that on the backside of justice who dispose of the destinies of men."

After a pause he added: "Prosecutors are always fond of fishing. Especially for perch."

He had the art of exposing vulgarity everywhere, an art which can only be mastered by one whose own demands on life are very high, and which springs from the ardent desire to see simplicity, beauty and harmony in man. He was a severe and merciless judge of vulgarity.

Someone said in his presence that the editor of

a popular magazine, a man perpetually talking about the necessity for love and sympathy for others, had insulted a railway guard without the slightest provocation, and was in the habit of treating his subordinates roughly.

"Naturally," said Anton Pavlovich, with a grim chuckle. "He's an aristocrat, a cultivated man . . . he went to a seminary. His father went about in bast shoes, but *he* wears patent-leather boots."

And the tone in which these words were spoken at once dismissed the "aristocrat" as a mediocre and ridiculous individual.

"A very gifted person," he said of a certain journalist. "His writing is always so lofty, so humane . . . saccharine. He calls his wife a fool in front of people. His servants sleep in a damp room, and they all develop rheumatism. . . ."

"Do you like So-and-So, Anton Pavlovich?"

"Oh, yes. A nice man," replies Anton Pavlovich, coughing. "He knows everything. He reads a lot. He took three books of mine and never returned them. A bit absent-minded, tells you one day that you're a fine fellow, and the next tells someone else that you stole the black silk socks with blue stripes of your mistress's husband."

Someone was heard to complain in his presence that the "serious" sections of the "heavy" magazines were dull and difficult.

"Just don't read those articles," Anton Pavlovich advised with the utmost conviction. "They're co-operative literature . . . the literature written by Messrs. Krasnov, Chernov and Belov (Red, Black and White). One writes an article, the other criticizes it, and the third reconciles the illogicalities of the first two. It's like playing vint with a dummy. But why the reader needs all this none of them ask themselves."

He was once visited by a stout lady, healthy, good-looking, well-dressed, who immediately began to talk "the Chekhov way."

"Life is so dull, Anton Pavlovich. Everything is so dingy—people, the sky, the sea, even flowers seem dingy to me. And there's nothing to wish for—my heart aches. It's like a kind of disease. . . ."

"It is a disease," said Anton Pavlovich energetically. "That's just what it is. The Latin name for it is morbus sham-itis."

Fortunately for herself the lady did not understand Latin, or perhaps she pretended not to.

"Critics are like horse-flies which hinder the horses in their ploughing of the soil," he said, with his wise chuckle. "The muscles of the horse are as taut as fiddle-strings, and suddenly a horse-fly alights on its croup, buzzing and stinging. The horse's skin quivers, it waves its tail. What is the fly buzzing about? It probably doesn't know, itself. It simply has a restless nature and wants to make itself felt—'I'm alive, too, you know!' it seems to say. 'Look, I know how to buzz, there's nothing I can't buzz about!' I've been reading reviews of my stories for twenty-five years, and can't remember a single useful point in any of them, or the slightest good advice. The only reviewer who ever made an impression on me was Skabichevsky, who prophesied that I would die drunk in the bottom of a ditch. . . ."

A subtle mockery almost always twinkled gently in his grey mournful eyes, but occasionally these eyes would become cold, keen, harsh, and at such moments a hard note would creep into the smooth, cordial tones of his voice, and then I felt that this modest, kindly man could stand up against any hostile force, stand up firmly, without knuckling under to it.

It sometimes seemed to me that there was a shade of hopelessness in his attitude to others, something akin to a cold, still despair.

"The Russian is a strange being," he said once. "He is like a sieve, he can hold nothing for long. In his youth he crams himself eagerly with everything that comes his way, and by the time he is thirty nothing is left of it all but a heap of colourless rubbish. If one wants to lead a good life, a human life, one must work. Work with love and with faith. And we don't know how to do that in our country. An architect, having built two or three decent houses, sits down to play cards for the rest of his life, or hangs about the backstage of a theatre. As soon as a doctor acquires a practice he stops keeping up with science, never reads anything but *Novosti Terapii (Therapeutical News)* and by the age of forty is firmly convinced that all diseases come from colds. I have never met a single official who had even the slightest idea of the significance of his work—they usually dig themselves in in the capital, or some provincial town, and invent papers which they dispatch to Zmiyev and Smorgon for fulfilment. And whose freedom of movement is impeded in Zmiyev

or Smorgon by these documents the official no more cares than an atheist does about the torments of hell. Having made a name by a successful defence the barrister ceases to bother about the defence of truth and does nothing but defend the rights of property, put money on horses, eat oysters, and pass himself off as a connoisseur of all the arts. An actor, having performed two or three parts with fair success, no longer learns his parts, but puts on a top hat and considers himself a genius. Russia is a land of greedy idlers. People eat and drink enormously, love to sleep in the daytime, and snore in their sleep. They marry for the sake of order in their homes, and take a mistress for the sake of social prestige. Their psychology is a dog's psychology. Beat them and they squeal meekly and sneak off to their kennels. Caress them, and they lie on their backs with their paws up, wagging their tails."

A cold, sorrowful contempt underlay these words. But while despising, he could pity, and when anyone was abused in his presence, Anton Pavlovich was sure to stick up for him.

"Come now! He's an old man, he's seventy. . . ."

Or:

"He's still young, it's just his stupidity. . . ."

And when he spoke like this I could see no signs of disgust in his face. . . .

When one is young, vulgarity seems to be simply amusing and insignificant, but it gradually surrounds the individual, its grey mist creeping into his brains and blood, like poison of charcoal fumes, till he becomes like an old tavern-sign, eaten up with rust—there seems to be something depicted on it, but what, it is impossible to make out.

From the very first Anton Pavlovich managed to reveal, in the grey ocean of vulgarity, its tragically sombre points. One only has to read his "humorous" stories carefully, to realize how much that was cruel was seen and shamefacedly concealed by the author in comic narrative and situations.

He had an almost virginal modesty, he could never bring himself to challenge people loudly and openly: "Be more decent—can't you!" vainly trusting that they would themselves realize the urgent necessity for being more decent. Detesting all that was vulgar and unclean, he described the seamy side of life in the lofty language of the poet, with the gentle smile of the humorist,

and the bitter inner reproach beneath the polished surface of his stories is scarcely noticeable.

The esteemed public, reading *A Daughter of Albion*, laughs, and is probably unable to see in this story the detestable sneers of the well-nourished squire at a forlorn individual, a stranger to everything and everyone. And in all Chekhov's humorous stories I seem to hear the gentle, profound sigh of a pure, truly human heart, a despairing sigh of pity for human beings unable to maintain their self-respect, and yielding without a struggle to brute force, living like slaves, believing in nothing but the necessity of swallowing as much succulent cabbage soup as possible every day, feeling nothing but the fear of being beaten by the powerful and the insolent.

No one ever understood the tragic nature of life's trifles so clearly and intuitively as Chekhov did, never before has a writer been able to hold up to human beings such a ruthlessly truthful picture of all that was shameful and pitiable in the dingy chaos of middle-class life.

His enemy was vulgarity. All his life he fought against it, held it up to scorn, displayed it with a keen impartial pen, discovering the fungus

of vulgarity even where, at first glance, everything seemed to be ordered for the best, the most convenient, and even brilliant. And vulgarity got back on him with an ugly trick by placing his dead body—the body of a poet—in a railway wagon for transporting oysters.

This dingy green wagon strikes me as the broad triumphant grin of vulgarity at its weary foe, and the innumerable "reminiscences" of the yellow press—mere hypocritical grief, behind which I seem to feel the cold, stinking breath of that very vulgarity which secretly rejoiced in the death of its enemy.

Reading the works of Chekhov makes one feel as if it were a sad day in late autumn, when the air is transparent, the bare trees stand out in bold relief against the sky, the houses are huddled together, and people are dim and dreary. Everything is so strange, so lonely, motionless, powerless. The remote distances are blue and void, merging with the pale sky, breathing a dreary cold on the half-frozen mud. But the mind of the author, like the autumn sunshine, lights up the well-trodden roads, the crooked streets, the dirty, cramped houses in which pitiful "little"

people gasp out their lives in boredom and idleness, filling their dwellings with a meaningless, drowsy bustle. There goes "the darling," as nervous as a little grey mouse, a sweet, humble woman, who loves so boundlessly and so slavishly. Strike her a blow on the cheek and she will not even dare, meek slave, to cry out. Beside her stands the melancholy Olga from *The Three Sisters*; she, too, is capable of boundless love and submits patiently to the whims of the depraved, vulgar wife of her faineant brother; the lives of her sisters fall in ruins around her and she only cries, incapable of doing anything about it, while not a single living, strong word of protest against vulgarity is formed within her.

And there go the tearful Ranevskaya and the rest of the former owners of *The Cherry Orchard*—selfish as children, and flabby as old people. They, who should have been dead long ago, whine and snivel, blind to what is going on around them, comprehending nothing, parasites unable to fasten their suckers into life again. The worthless student Trofimov holds forth eloquently on the need for working, and fritters away his time, amusing himself by dull-witted taunts at Varya, who works unceasingly for the welfare of the idlers.

Vershinin (the hero of *The Three Sisters*) dreams of the good life to come in three hundred years, and in the meantime does not notice that everything around him is falling to pieces, that before his very eyes Solyony is ready, out of boredom and stupidity, to kill the pitiable Baron Tusenbach.

A long procession of slaves to love, to their own stupidity and laziness, to their greed for earthly blessings, passes before the reader's eyes. Here are the slaves to the obscure fear of life, moving in vague anxiety and filling the air with inarticulate ravings about the future, feeling that there is no place for them in the present. . . .

Sometimes the report of a gun is heard from the grey mass—this is Ivanov or Treplev, who, having suddenly discovered the only thing to do, has given up the ghost.

Many of them indulge in beautiful dreams of the glorious life to come in two hundred years, and nobody thinks of asking the simple question: who is to make it glorious, if we do nothing but dream?

And now a great, wise man passes by this dull, dreary crowd of impotent creatures, casting an attentive glance on them all, these dreary inhabi-

tants of his native land, and says, with his sad smile, in tones of gentle but profound reproach, with despairing grief on his face and in his heart, in a voice of exquisite sincerity:

"What a dull life you lead, gentlemen!"

Five days of fever, but no desire to rest. The grey Finnish rain sprinkles the earth with a moist dust. The guns of Fort Ino thunder continuously. At night the long tongue of a searchlight licks up the clouds, a loathsome sight, for it is a constant reminder of the fiendish disease—war.

I read Chekhov. If he had not died ten years ago the war would probably have killed him, first poisoning him by hatred of men. I remembered his funeral.

The coffin of the writer, so "tenderly loved" by Moscow, was brought in a green wagon bearing the inscription "Oysters" in big letters on the door. A section of the small crowd which had gathered at the station to meet the writer followed the coffin of General Keller just arrived from Manchuria, and wondered why Chekhov was being carried to his grave to the music of a military band. When the mistake was discovered certain genial persons began laughing and snig-

gering. Chekhov's coffin was followed by about a hundred people, not more. Two lawyers stand out in my memory, both in new boots and gaily patterned ties, like bridegrooms. Walking behind them I heard one of them, V. A. Maklakov, talking about the cleverness of dogs, and the other, whom I did not know, boasting of the convenience of his summer cottage and the beauty of its environments. And some lady in a purple dress, holding up a lace sunshade, was assuring an old gentleman in horn-rimmed spectacles:

"Oh, he was such a darling, and so witty. . . ."

The old gentleman coughed incredulously. It was a hot, dusty day. The procession was headed by a stout police officer on a stout white horse. All this and much more was disgustingly vulgar and highly inappropriate to the memory of the great and subtle artist.

In a letter to old A. S. Suvorin, Chekhov wrote:

"There is nothing drearier and more unpoetical than the prosaic struggle for existence, destroying the joy of life, and creating apathy."

These words are the expression of an extremely Russian mood, and in my opinion are not

at all like A. P. In Russia, where there is so much of everything, but where people have no love of work, the majority think thus. Russians admire energy, but do not really believe in it. A writer who is the exponent of the active mood, Jack London, for instance, would be impossible in Russia. Jack London's books are very popular in Russia, but I have not observed that they stimulate the will of Russians to action, they merely stir their imaginations. But Chekhov was not very Russian in that sense of the word. From his earliest youth the "struggle for existence" had to be waged in the joyless, colourless form of daily petty cares for a crust of bread—and a big crust was needed, for others as well as himself. To these cares, devoid of joy, he gave all his youthful energies, and the wonder is how he managed to preserve his sense of humour. He saw life as nothing but the weary striving for enough to eat, for peace. Its great dramas and tragedies were concealed from him by a thick layer of the commonplace. And it was only when he no longer had to worry about earning bread for others that he could cast a keen glance at the truth about these dramas.

I have never met anyone who felt the importance

of work as the basis of culture so profoundly and diversely as A. P. This feeling showed itself in all the trifles of his home life, in the selection of things for the home, in that love for things in themselves, and, while quite untainted by the desire to collect, he never wearied of admiring them as the product of man's creative spirit. Ho loved building, planting gardens, adorning the earth, he felt the poetry of work. With what touching care he watched the growth of the fruit-trees and flowering shrubs he had himself planted. In the midst of the innumerable cares connected with the building of his house at Autka, he said:

"If everyone in the world did all he was capable of on his own plot of land, what a beautiful world it would be!"

I was just then in the throes of writing my play *Vasily Buslayev* and I read Vasily's boastful monologue to him:

If I only had more strength in me!
With hot breath I'd melt the snows around,
Go about the world and plough its lands;
Stately towns and cities I would found,
Churches would I build, and orchards plant,
Like a lovely girl the world would look!

In my arms I'd take it, like a bride,
To my bosom I would hold the earth,
Take it up and bear it to the Lord.
"Look, Lord God, look down upon the world,
See how pretty I have made it now!
You had tossed it like a stone to heaven,
I have made it like a precious jewel!
Look at it, and let your heart rejoice!
See how green it shines beneath the sun!
Gladly would I give it up to you,
But I cannot—it's too dear to me.

Chekhov liked this monologue, and coughing nervously, said to me and Dr. A. N. Aleksin:

"Good. . . . Very good. . . . Real, human. That's precisely where the 'meaning of all philosophy' lies. Man inhabited the world, he will make it a good place for him to live in." Nodding his head resolutely, he repeated: "He will!"

He asked me to read Vasily's monologue again, and listened, looking out of the window.

"The last two lines won't do. They're defiant. Superfluous."

He spoke little and reluctantly about his literary work. I had almost said with the same vir-

ginal reserve with which he spoke about Lev Tolstoi. Very occasionally, when in spirits, he would relate the plot of a story, laughing—it was always a humorous story.

"I say, I'm going to write a story about a schoolmistress, an atheist—she adores Darwin, is convinced of the necessity for fighting the prejudices and snperstitions of the people, and herself goes to the bath-house at midnight to scald a black cat to get a wishbone for attracting a man and arousing his love—there is such a bone, you know. . . ."

He always spoke of his plays as "amusing," and really seemed to be sincerely convinced that he wrote "amusing plays." No doubt Savva Morozov was repeating Chekhov's own words when he stubbornly maintained: "Chekhov's plays must be produced as lyrical comedies."

But to literature in general he always gave the keenest attention, especially touching in the case of "beginners." He read the lengthy manuscripts of B. Lazarevsky, N. Oliger and many others with admirable patience.

"We need more writers," he said. "Literature is still a new thing in our daily life, even for the 'elect.' There is a writer for every two hundred

and twenty-six people in Norway, and here only one for every million."

His disease sometimes called into being a hypochondriac, or even a misanthropical, mood. At such times he would be extremely critical, and very hard to get on with.

One day, lying on the sofa, giving dry coughs, and playing with the thermometer, he said:

"To live simply to die is by no means amusing, but to live with the knowledge that you will die before your time, that really is idiotic. . . ."

Another time, seated at the open window and gazing out into the distance, at the sea, he suddenly said peevishly:

"We are accustomed to live in hopes of good weather, a good harvest, a nice love-affair, hopes of becoming rich or getting the office of chief of police, but I've never noticed anyone hoping to get wiser. We say to ourselves: it'll be better under a new tsar, and in two hundred years it'll be still better, and nobody tries to make this good time come tomorrow. On the whole, life gets more and more complex every day and moves on at its own sweet will,

and people get more and more stupid, and more and more isolated from life."

After a pause he added, wrinkling up his forehead:

"Like crippled beggars in a religious procession."

He was a doctor, and the illness of a doctor is always worse than the illnesses of his patients. The patients only feel, but the doctor, as well as feeling, has a pretty good idea of the destructive effect of the disease on his constitution. This is a case in which knowledge brings death nearer.

His eyes were very beautiful when he laughed —there was a feminine gentleness in them then, something soft and tender. And his laughter, almost noiseless, had something particularly attractive about it. He really seemed to enjoy laughing. I have never known anybody who could laugh so "spiritually," if the term is permissible.

Indecent stories never made him laugh.

He once said to me, with his delightful, kindly smile:

"Do you know why Tolstoi is so fickle in his treatment of you? He's jealous, he's afraid

Sulerzhitsky likes you more than him. He is, really! He said to me yesterday: 'I don't know how it is, but somehow I can never be myself with Gorky. I don't like Suler living with him. It's bad for Suler. Gorky's wicked. He's like a divinity student who has been forced to take monastic vows and has a grievance against the whole world. He has the soul of an emissary, he has come from somewhere to the land of Canaan, an alien land for him, and he keeps looking round, noting everything, so as to report about it all to some god of his own. And his god is a monster, a wood sprite or a water sprite, like the ones countrywomen fear.'"

Chekhov laughed till he cried as he told me this, and continued, wiping away his tears:

"I said: 'Gorky's a good sort.' But he said: 'No, no, don't tell me! He has a nose like a duck's bill, only unfortunate and bad-tempered people have such noses. And women don't like him, and women are like dogs, they always know a good man. Suler, now, he has the priceless gift of disinterested love. In that respect he's a genius. To be capable of loving is to be capable of anything. . . .'"

After a pause Chekhov went on:

"Yes, the old boy's jealous . . . isn't he marvellous?. . ."

When he spoke about Tolstoi, there was always an almost imperceptible smile, at once tender and shy, in his eyes, and he lowered his voice, as if speaking of something fragile and mysterious, something that must be handled with care and affection.

He constantly deplored the fact that there was no Eckermann by Tolstoi's side, to jot down the keen, unexpected, and frequently contradictory utterances of the old sage.

"*You* ought to do it," he assured Sulerzhitsky. "Tolstoi's so fond of you, he talks such a lot to you, and says such wonderful things."

Of Suler himself, Chekhov said to me:

"He is a wise child."

Very well said.

I once heard Tolstoi praise a story of Chekhov's —*The Darling* I think it was.

"It's like lace woven by a virtuous maiden," he said. "There used to be girl lace-makers in the old days, who, their whole lives long, wove their dreams of happiness into the pattern. They

wove their fondest dreams, their lace was saturated with vague, pure aspirations of love." Tolstoi spoke with true emotion, with tears in his eyes.

But that day Chekhov had a temperature, and sat with his head bent, vivid spots of colour on his cheeks, carefully wiping his pince-nez. He said nothing for some time, and at last, sighing, said softly and awkwardly: "There are misprints in it."

Much could be written of Chekhov, but this would require close, precise narration, and that is what I'm no good at. He should be written about as he himself wrote *The Steppe*, a fragrant, open-air, very Russian story, pensive and wistful. A story for one's self.

It does one good to remember a man like that, it is like a sudden visitation of cheerfulness, it gives a clear meaning to life again.

Man is the axis of the universe.

And his vices, you ask, his shortcomings?

We all hunger for the love of our fellow creatures, and when one is hungry, even a half-baked loaf tastes sweet.

VLADIMIR KOROLENKO AND HIS TIMES

I LEFT TSARITSYN in May, at the dawn of a dull, windy day, intending to be in Nizhni-Novgorod by September.

Part of the way I travelled with the guards on goods trains, over the buffers, but most of the time I went on foot, earning my bread at *stanitsas*, in villages, and in monasteries. I crossed the Don region to the Tambov and Ryazan gubernias, from Ryazan, along the River Oka, I turned off in the direction of Moscow, and went to the Khamovniki District, to see Tolstoi. Sophia Andreyevna told me he had gone to the Troitsko-Sergiyevskaya Monastery. I met her in the yard at the door of a shed crammed with bundles of books, and she led me into the kitchen, kindly gave me a glass of coffee and a white roll, and told me, by the way, that a great many "suspi-

cious loafers" found their way to Lev Tolstoi, and that Russia has an abundance of idlers. I had seen that for myself and was able without the slightest insincerity to admit that this clever woman's observation was perfectly true.

It was the end of September, the autumn rains were falling on the earth in plentiful showers, a chill wind raked the stubbly fields, and the woods wore their vividest hues. This is a very beautiful season, but not very convenient for travelling on foot, especially when one has holes in one's boots.

At the goods siding of the Moscow railway I persuaded the guard to let me into a cattle-truck in which were eight Cherkassy bulls destined for the slaughter-house of Nizhni-Novgorod. Five of them behaved very well, but the rest, for some reason, did not regard me with favour, and the whole way did their best to cause me all sorts of unpleasantnesses. Every time they succeeded the bulls snorted and bellowed their satisfaction.

And the guard, a little bow-legged drunkard with a ragged moustache, imposed on me the duty of feeding my fellow-travellers. Whenever the train stopped he flung a bundle of hay through the door of the truck and shouted at me:

"Treat them!"

I spent thirty-four hours in the company of the bulls, innocently believing that I should never meet with more vicious beasts in my life.

I had a notebook full of verses in my knapsack and a splendid prose poem, *The Song of the Old Oak*.

I have never been prone to self-assurance, and at that time I was still semi-literate, but I sincerely believed I had written a marvellous poem. I had put into it all I had pondered over in the course of ten years of vivid, far from easy life. And I was convinced that a lettered individual, reading my poem, would be amazed at the novelty of all I had put before him, and that the truth of my epic would stun all earth's dwellers, and an honest, pure, care-free life would begin at once—this was all I wanted.

In Nizhni-Novgorod I met N. Y. Karonin, whom I often visited, without, however, venturing to show him my philosophical work. The sick Nikolai Karonin aroused in me a feeling of keen pity, and I felt with my whole being that here was a man stubbornly, painfully meditating some important matter.

"It may be so," he would say, blowing thick

clouds of cigarette smoke through his nostrils, inhaling deeply again, and chuckling, as he ended up:

"And it may not be so."

His conversation surprised me a great deal, I could not help feeling that this tortured being was entitled, was bound to speak differently, more definitely. All this, together with my sincere sympathy for him, made me somewhat cautious in my dealings with Petropavlovsky, as if I feared to hurt him, to cause him pain.

I had seen him in Kazan where he stayed a few days on the way back from exile. He made an ineradicable impression on me, as of a man who, his whole life long, found himself in a place where he did not wish to be.

"Now what on earth made me come here?"

These were the words which met me as I went into the murky room of a one-storey annex in the filthy yard of a draymen's tavern. In the middle of the room stood a tall, stoop-shouldered man, looking thoughtfully at the dial of a large watch. In the fingers of his other hand was a smoking cigarette. He began pacing the floor on his long legs, giving brief answers to the questions of S. G. Somov, the landlord.

His short-sighted, clear, childlike eyes looked weary and troubled. His cheeks and chin were covered with fair bristles of uneven length. The straight, long-unwashed hair of a deacon grew on his square skull. Thrusting his left hand into the pocket of his crumpled trousers, he rattled some copper coins in it, his right hand holding a cigarette which he waved about like a conductor's baton. He inhaled smoke. He kept giving dry coughs, his eyes on the watch all the time, making dreary clucking sounds with his lips. The movements of his awkwardly built bony frame showed that here was a man mortally fatigued. The room gradually filled with half a score or so of glum-looking schoolboys, students, a baker and a glazier.

Karonin related to them in the hollow tones of a consumptive his adventures in exile, and told them of the mood prevailing among political exiles. He spoke without looking at anyone, as if talking to himself, frequently making brief pauses, and looking around him helplessly as he sat on the window-sill. Over his head was an open casement, through which came a blast of cold air, saturated with the smell of dung and horse-piss. The hair on Karonin's head

stirred, he smoothed it down with the long fingers of his bony hand and answered questions:

"It is possible, but I am not sure that that's how things are. I don't know. I couldn't say. . . ."

The youths did not like Karonin. They were accustomed to listen to people who knew everything and could speak well. The very cautiousness of his story drew from them the ironic observation: "Scared rabbit."

But my comrade Anatoly, the glazier, considered that the honest thoughtfulness of Karonin's childlike gaze and his frequent "I don't know" might be explained by another sort of fear: a man well-acquainted with life fears to lead his innocent flock astray by saying more than he can honestly be sure of. People with direct experience of life, like Anatoly and myself, were inclined to be sceptical of bookish people. We knew the schoolboys well and could see that they were at that moment pretending to be more serious than usual.

About midnight Karonin abruptly stopped talking, stepped into the middle of the room and stood there in a cloud of smoke, rubbing his face vigorously with the palms of his hands, as if washing with invisible water. Then he drew a

watch out from under his belt, held it right up to his nose and said hurriedly:

"Very well, then. I must go now. My daughter is ill. Very. Good-bye."

Firmly pressing with his hot fingers the hands extended to him, he left the room with a swaying gait, and we started on an internecine dispute—the inevitable result of all such talks.

Karonin kept an anxious watch over the Tolstoian movement among the Nizhni-Novgorod intellectuals, and helped to get up a colony in the Simbirsk Gubernia. He has described the speedy collapse of these plans in his story *The Borskaya Colony*.

"Try 'going back to the land,'" he advised me. "Perhaps it would suit you."

But suicidal experiments in self-torture held no charm for me, moreover I had seen in Moscow M. Novosyolov, one of the chief founders of the Tolstoian theories, who organized the Tver and Smolensk artels, and later became a contributor to *Pravoslavnoye Obozreniye* (*Orthodox Church Review*), and the sworn foe of L. N. Tolstoi.

This was a very tall man, evidently possessed of considerable physical strength, who flaunted the primitiveness, not to say grossness of his

thought and behaviour, and beneath this grossness I detected the ill-concealed rancour of ambition. He harshly rejected "culture," and this displeased me—for me culture was a sphere in which I was making painful progress, hampered by innumerable obstacles.

I made his acquaintance at the house of the Nechayevist Orlov, the translator of Leopardi and Flaubert, one of the organizers of the excellent *Literary Pantheon* series. The intelligent, highly cultivated old man held up "Tolstoi-ism" to devastating ridicule the whole evening. At that time I was rather keen on the doctrine, which, however, I never regarded as anything but a chance for temporary retirement to a quiet corner where I might rest and ponder over all I had gone through.

Naturally I was aware that V. G. Korolenko lived in Nizhni-Novgorod, and had read his *Makar's Dream,* which story I somehow did not care for.

One rainy day the friend with whom I was out walking, looked aside and said:

"Korolenko!"

A sturdy, broad-shouldered man in a shaggy overcoat was striding firmly along the pavement, and from beneath a dripping umbrella I caught

sight of a curly beard. He reminded me of Tambov cattle dealers, a tribe I had the best grounds for disliking, and I felt not the slightest desire to make his acquaintance. Nor was any such desire quickened in me by the advice given me by a General of Police—an instance of the amusing tricks played by life in Russia.

I was arrested and put in one of the four towers of the Nizhni-Novgorod gaol. There was nothing of interest in my circular cell but an inscription scratched on the iron-bound door:

All life comes from a cell.

For a long time I puzzled over the meaning of these words. Not knowing that they constituted a biological axiom, I made up my mind that they were the effusion of a humorist.

I was brought for interrogation to General Poznansky, who, patting the papers taken from me with a puffy, crimson hand, said between snuffles:

"There's some good verse of yours here, and, altogether . . . go on writing! Good verse—a pleasure to read. . . ."

And it was a pleasure for me, too, to know that the General was accessible to certain truths.

I did not consider that the word "good" applied precisely to my verses, and at that time very few intellectuals would have been found to agree with the General's evaluation of poetry.

I. I. Svedentsov, writer, officer of the guards and one-time exile, who brought out gloomy stories in the "heavies," spoke warmly of the members of the Narodnaya Volya (People's Will) Society, especially of Vera Figner, but when I read him the lines of Fofanov:

I did not hear what you said to me,
But I think it was something tender ...

he snorted angrily.

"Silly chatter. Perhaps she only asked him the time, and he rejoiced, the blockhead!"

The General was a thickset man in a grey tunic with missing buttons, and in grey shabby trousers. Moist, dim eyes gazed mournfully and wearily out of his puffy face fringed with grey hair and covered by a network of crimson veins. I thought him neglected and pathetic, but not unlikeable; he reminded me of a pedigree dog, too old and weary to bark.

From the collected speeches of A. F. Kony I knew the tragedy of this General's life, I knew

that his daughter was a gifted pianist, and that he was himself addicted to opium. He was the founder and chairman of the "Technical Society" in Nizhni-Novgorod, and, while belittling at the meetings of this society the importance of handicraft industries, opened a shop in the principal street in the town for the sale of goods made by hand in the gubernia. He sent to Petersburg denunciations of his countrymen, Korolenko and Governor Baranov, who was addicted to writing denunciations himself.

Everything around the General spoke of neglect. Crumpled bed-clothes lay on the leather sofa, from beneath which peeped out a dirty boot and a lump of alabaster which must have weighed several stones. Chaffinches, goldfinches and bullfinches hopped about in cages hanging in front of the windows, in the corner of the study was a big table littered with physics apparatus, and on the table in front of me was a thick book entitled *Theory of Electricity* in French, and a volume of Sechenov's *Reflexes of the Cerebral Hemispheres*.

The old man puffed incessantly at short thick cigarettes, and the clouds of smoke coming from them made me nervous, suggesting the

absurd idea that the tobacco was saturated with morphine.

"What sort of a revolutionary are you?" he said irritably. "You're not a Jew or a Pole. You write—well, what of that? Look here, when I release you, show your manuscripts to Korolenko—know him? You don't? He's a serious writer, as good as Turgenev. . . ."

A heavy, suffocating smell hovered around the General. He spoke as if unwillingly, dragging out one word after another with a visible effort. It was very boring. I examined the little show-case beside the table, in which were rows of metal discs.

Noticing the direction of my eyes, the General lurched heavily upwards.

"Do they interest you?"

Moving his chair closer to the show-case he opened it, saying:

"They're medals struck in memory of historical events and persons. Here's one on the taking of the Bastille, and this one memorizes the victory of Nelson at Abukir—do you know French history? This is in memory of the Swiss Union and here's the famous Galvani—see what fine work! This is Cuvier, it's not nearly so good."

The pince-nez quivered on his crimson nose, his moist eyes grew lively, he held the medals between his thick fingers as carefully as if they were glass and not bronze.

"Beautiful art!" he muttered and, pursing his lips comically, he blew the dust from the medals.

I sincerely admired the beauty of the metal discs and could see that the old man loved them tenderly.

Closing the lid of the case with a sigh he asked me whether I liked song birds. This was a sphere in which I felt pretty sure I was more at home than the General. And a lively conversation about birds was struck up between us.

The old man had already called the policeman to take me back to gaol, the burly corporal stood at attention in the doorway, and his chief was still talking, clucking his tongue ruefully:

"I simply can't get hold of a martin. It's a beautiful bird. Altogether, birds are splendid folk, aren't they? Well, off with you! Oh, yes," he added, as if suddenly remembering. "You must learn to write, you know, not all this. . . ."

A few days later I again sat opposite the General, who muttered angrily:

"Of course you knew where Somov went, you should have told me, I would have released you at once. And you shouldn't have laughed at the officer who searched your room. And . . . altogether. . . ."

But he suddenly leaned towards me and asked good-humouredly:

"So you don't snare birds any more?"

Ten years after my amusing acquaintanceship with the General I was arrested, and found myself in the Nizhni-Novgorod police station awaiting interrogation. A young aide-de-camp came up to me, and asked:

"Do you remember General Poznansky? He was my father. He died at Tomsk. He took a great interest in your fate, followed your literary successes, and often said that he was the first to recognize your talent. Not long before his death he asked me to give you those medals you used to like—that is, if you wish to accept them. . . ."

I could not help being touched. When I left the prison I accepted the medals and presented them to the Nizhni-Novgorod museum.

. . . I was not passed for the army. The fat jolly doctor who looked rather like a butcher,

and disposed of the soldiers as if they were bulls for the slaughter, said, while examining me:

"You have a hole in your lung. And a swollen vein in the leg, too. Unfit!"

This vexed me exceedingly.

A short time before I was called up, I got to know a military topographer, his name was something like Paskhin or Paskhalov.

He had taken part in the battle of Kushka and gave an interesting description of life on the frontiers of Afghanistan—in the spring he expected to be sent to the Pamirs to make a survey of Russian frontiers. Tall, sinewy, highly-strung, he painted skilful little oil-paintings of military life in the style of Fedotov, very entertaining. I felt something discordant, some conflict in him, that something which is called "abnormal." He tried to persuade me to join a survey unit.

"I'll take you to the Pamirs," he said. "You'll see the most beautiful sight in the world—the desert. Mountains are chaos, the desert is harmony."

Narrowing his big, grey, strangely roving eyes, and lowering his soft, caressing voice to a whisper, he murmured mysteriously of the

beauty of the desert. I listened admiringly, struck dumb. How could anyone speak so entrancingly of emptiness, of endless sands, unbroken silence, torrid heat and the torments of thirst?

"That doesn't matter," he said, on learning that I had not been passed for the army. "Write out a statement that you want to volunteer for a survey unit and undertake to pass the necessary examinations—I'll arrange it all for you."

The statement was written and handed in. I awaited the result in some trepidation. A few days later Paskhalov said in some confusion:

"It appears you are politically unreliable, so there's nothing I can do."

He lowered his eyes and added softly:

"A pity you kept that fact from me."

I said this "fact" was news to me, too, but I don't think he believed me. Soon after he left the town, and at Christmas I read in a Moscow newspaper that he had cut his throat with a razor in the public baths.

My life went on, tortuous and difficult. I worked in a beer warehouse, rolling barrels about a damp cellar, washing and corking bottles,

This took my whole day. I entered the office of a distillery, but on my very first day there a greyhound belonging to the wife of the factory manager attacked me, and I killed it with a blow of my fist on its long skull, for which I was instantly dismissed.

Once, on a day of bad weather, I at last made up my mind to show my poem to V. G. Korolenko. A snow-storm had been raging for three days, the streets were piled high with snow-drifts, the roofs of the houses wore caps of feathery snow, like bird-houses in silvery night-caps, window-panes were swathed in icy scrolls, and in the pale sky the cold sun shone, dazzling, ardent.

Vladimir Galaktionovich Korolenko lived on the outskirts of the town in the second storey of a wooden house. On the pavement in front of the porch a sturdily-built individual in a queer-looking fur cap and ear mufflers, a clumsy sheepskin jacket reaching to his knees, and heavy Vyatka felt boots, was skilfully wielding a heavy spade.

I floundered through a snow-drift to the porch.

"Who do you want?"

"Korolenko."

"I'm Korolenko."

A pair of good brown eyes looked at me out of a countenance framed in a thick, curly beard, encrusted with hoarfrost. I did not recognize him, not having seen his face that time I met him in the street. Leaning on the handle of his spade, he listened in silence as I explained the reason of my visit, and then, screwing up his eyes, seemed to remember.

"I know the name. Aren't you the one a man called Mikhailo Antonovich Romas wrote to me about, two years ago?"

Coming on to the steps he asked:

"Aren't you cold? You're very lightly dressed."

And added in low tones, as if talking to himself: "Stubborn fellow—Romas. Clever Khokhol.* Wonder where he is now."

In the small corner room looking out on the garden, crammed with furniture—two office desks, bookcases, three chairs—he said, wiping his wet beard with a handkerchief and turning over the leaves of my thick manuscript:

"I'll read it. How queer your handwriting

* Ukrainian.— *Tr.*

is—looks so simple and clear, and yet it's hard to read."

The manuscript lay on his knees, and he glanced obliquely now at the pages, now at me, much to my embarrassment. "You have a word 'zizgag' here, it must be a slip—there's no such word, it ought to be 'zigzag.'"

The slight pause before the word "slip" showed me that V. G. Korolenko was one who knew how to spare his neighbour's vanity.

"Romas wrote me that the peasants tried to blow him up with gunpowder, and then set fire to him—is it true?"

He turned the leaves of the manuscript as he spoke.

"Foreign words should only be used in cases of absolute necessity, as a rule they should be avoided. The Russian language is rich enough, it contains all the means for expressing the most subtle sensations and shades of meaning."

He said this as it were casually, while asking about Romas and the countryside.

"What an austere face you have," he said abruptly, and added, smiling: "Is your life very hard?"

His gentle speech was not at all like the rough

Volga accent, but I found in him the strangest likeness to a Volga pilot—and this not only in his thickset, broad-chested frame and keen glance, but in the good-humoured serenity characteristic of people who see life as movement along the winding bed of a river, between hidden sandbanks and rocks.

"You sometimes use coarse words—I suppose they seem strong to you. People often think that."

I told him that I knew I was inclined to coarseness, but that I had never had time to acquire gentle words and feeling, nor a place where I could have done this.

Casting a searching glance at me, he went on kindly:

"You write: 'I came into the world to protest! And since that is so. . . .' 'Since that' won't do. It's an ugly turn of speech—'Since that is so.' Don't you feel it?"

All this was new to me, but I at once felt the truth of his remarks.

Further on in my poem someone sits "like an eagle" on the ruins of a temple.

"Not a very suitable place for such a pose, and it is not so much majestic as indecent," said Korolenko, smiling.

And then he found one "slip" after another. I was confounded by their number, and no doubt my cheeks glowed like burning coals. Noticing my condition, Korolenko told me, laughing, of some mistakes made by Gleb Uspensky—this was magnanimous, but I could no longer hear or take in anything, and all I wanted was to flee from the shame I felt. It is well known that writers and actors are as touchy as poodles.

I left him, and spent several days in a state of gloom and depression.

This writer was different, I felt. He was not in the least like the shattered and winning Karonin, not to mention the queer Starostin. Nor had he anything in common with the gloomy Svedentsov-Ivanovich, who once said to me: "A story ought to strike the reader to his soul, it ought to be like a stick, so that the reader should feel what a beast he is."

In those words there was something akin to my own mood. Korolenko was the first to speak to me in weighty, human words of the meaning of form, the beauty of phrases, and I was amazed by the simple, comprehensible truth of his words, and felt, with a pang, that writing was no easy matter. I stayed with him over

two hours, he told me much, but not a word did he say of the essence, the content of my poem. I already realized that I was not to hear anything good of it.

A fortnight later the red-haired N. I. Dryagin, a wise, delightful person, brought me back my manuscript, and said:

"Korolenko thinks he frightened you off. He says you have a gift, but that one should write from reality, without philosophizing. And he says you have humour, if a bit coarse, and that's a good thing. And he says your verses are ravings."

On the cover of the manuscript was pencilled, in angular handwriting:

"It is hard to judge of your ability from your *Song*, but I think you have some. Write about something you have yourself experienced, and show it to me. I am no judge of poetry, I find yours hard to understand, though there are single lines which are strong and vivid. V. K."

Of the content of the manuscript—not a word. What did this strange man find in it?

Two sheets of paper fell out of the manuscript. On one was a poem entitled "Voice from the Mountain to the Climber," the other "What the Devil Said to the Wheel." I do not now remem-

ber exactly what it was the devil and the wheel discussed, or what the "Voice from the Mountain" said. I tore up verses and manuscript, flung them into the Dutch stove and sat down on the floor to ponder over the meaning of writing "about what I had myself experienced."

I had experienced everything written in my poem.

And those verses! They had got into the manuscript quite by accident. They were a little secret of mine, I had never shown them to anyone, and hardly understood them myself. Among my friends, the morocco-bound volumes of François Coppée, Jean Richepin, Thomas Hood and other such poets, in the translations of Barykova and Likhachov, were valued higher than Pushkin, not to mention Fofanov's melodies. Nekrasov was the king of poetry. The young men admired Nadson, but the older generation treated even Nadson condescendingly.

Respectable individuals whom I sincerely revered considered me a serious person, twice a week discussed with me the importance of home industries, "the requirements of the people and the duties of intellectuals," the corrupt infection of capitalism which would never—never!—find a

foothold in peasant, socialist Russia. And now everyone would know that I wrote fantastic verses. I felt sorry for the people who would be forced to change their kind and serious attitude to me.

I determined to write neither verse nor prose any more, and actually wrote nothing at all the whole time I lived in Nizhni-Novgorod, nearly two years. And sometimes I felt a strong desire to write.

With the utmost sorrow I sacrificed my wisdom to the all-cleansing flame.

V. G. Korolenko held aloof from the group of intellectual radicals, among whom I felt like a sparrow in a family of sage ravens.

The writer these people admired most was N. N. Zlatovratsky, of whom they said: "Zlatovratsky purges and uplifts the soul."

A certain instructor of youth recommended this writer as follows:

"Read Zlatovratsky, I know him personally, he's an honest man."

Gleb Uspensky was read earnestly, though he was suspected of scepticism, which, as an attitude to the countryside, was unpardonable. They read Karonin, Machtet, Zasodimsky, and

glanced through Potapenko: "He seems all right. . . ."

Mamin-Sibiryak was in favour, though it was said of him that his "tendencies" were "vague."

Turgenev, Dostoyevsky, Lev Tolstoi—all these remained outside the pale. Lev Tolstoi, the religious prophet, was thus summed up: "He plays the fool."

My friends did not know what to think of Korolenko. He had been in exile and written *Makar's Dream,* and both these things, of course, recommended him strongly. But there was something suspicious in his stories, something to which people absorbed in literature about the countryside and the peasant were not used.

"He writes with his head," they said of Korolenko. "And the people can only be understood with one's soul."

The beautiful story called *In the Night* was in special disfavour, the author's tendency to "metaphysics" being d tected in it—a heinous crime. A member of V. G.'s circle—A. I. Bogdanovich I think it was—even wrote a distinctly malicious and witty parody of this story.

"Rubbish!" stuttered S. G. Somov, a slightly abnormal man, who nevertheless had considerable

influence on the young. "The d-d-description of the physiological act of birth is not a subject for fiction—and there is no point in dragging in black beetles. He im-m-mitates Tolstoi, K-k-korolenko does."

But the name of Korolenko was by now heard in all the circles in the town. He had become a conspicuous figure in cultural life, and, like a magnet, attracted attention, sympathy, and hostility.

"He seeks popularity," said those who could find nothing better to say.

At that time grave thefts from the local bank had come to light. This very commonplace event had extremely dramatic consequences—the chief culprit, a provincial "lion and heart-smiter," died in prison, and his wife took a solution of copper in hydrochloric acid. Immediately after the funeral a man who had loved her shot himself over her grave, two other persons involved in the case died one after the other, and it was rumoured that they, too, had committed suicide.

V. G. contributed articles to the *Volzhsky Vestnik* (*Volga Herald*) about the affairs of the bank, which came out at the same time that all these tragedies occurred. Sensitive persons began

saying that Korolenko had "slain human beings with newspaper articles," but my patron A. I. Lanin argued fervently that "no earthly phenomenon is alien to the artist."

Since everyone knows that there is nothing easier than to slander others, Korolenko was generously showered by petty-minded folk with all sorts of slander.

In those sluggish years life rotated slowly, ascending by an invisible spiral to its invisible goal, and in these rotations the thickset figure of a man who looked like a pilot became more and more conspicuous. When the case of the Skoptsy* was tried, V. G. was in the seats reserved for the public, sketching in his notebook the death-like countenances of the accused. He was to be seen in the hall of the Zemstvo assembly, and during religious processions—no event of the slightest importance failed to attract his calm attention.

A fair-sized group of people remarkable in the most diverse ways were drawn to him—N. F. Annensky, a man with a keen, lively mind; S. Y. Yelpatyevsky, doctor and writer, good-humoured

* A religious sect.— *Tr.*

and cheerful, and a persistent lover of humanity; Angel I. Bogdanovich, thoughtful and caustic; "the gentleman of the revolution," A. I. Ivanchin-Pisarev; A. A. Savelyev, chairman of the Zemstvo board; Apollon Karelin, the author of the briefest and most eloquent proclamation I have ever read—the three words: "Demand a Constitution," on bills which he had stuck on the walls of buildings in Nizhni-Novgorod, after March 1, 1881.

Korolenko's circle was jokingly dubbed "The Society of Sober Philosophers," and its members sometimes gave interesting lectures. I remember Karelin's brilliant lecture on Saint-Just, and one by Yelpatyevsky on "the new poetry"—at that time the poetry of Fofanov, Frug, Korinfsky, Medvedsky, Minsky, Merezhkovsky, was regarded in that light. The Zemstvo statisticians N. I. Dryagin, Kislyakov, M. A. Plotnikov, Konstantinov, Schmidt, and a few other equally serious investigators of the Russian countryside, belonged to the "Sober Philosophers." Each of these men left a deep impression on the study of the incomprehensible life of the peasantry. And each was himself the centre of a small circle profoundly interested in this mysterious life. There was something to be learned from each.

This serious, utterly impartial attitude to village life was extremely useful to me. Thus the influence of Korolenko's circle spread wide, even penetrating sections of society formerly almost inaccessible to cultural influence.

I had a friend, Pimen Vlasyev, yardman for the great Caspian fishing magnate Markov—an ordinary, snub-nosed Russian peasant, whose frame seemed to have been hastily and unskilfully put together. One day, while telling me of the illegal intentions of his employer, he said, lowering his voice mysteriously:

"He would do it, I'm sure, but he's afraid of Korolenko. A queer fellow has come from Petersburg, Korolenko he's called, he's the nephew of a foreign king, they've hired him from abroad to look into things—they don't trust the governor. And that Korolenko, he's put the fear of God into the nobility."*

* The writer S. Yeleonsky stated in print that the legend of V. G. Korolenko as the "Aglitski (English) Prince" sprang from the intellectuals. I wrote to him at the time that he was wrong, the legend hails from Nizhni-Novgorod, and I consider its author was Pimen Vlasyev. It was widely circulated in the Nizhni-Novgorod region. I heard it in 1903 in Vladikavkaz from a Balakhna carpenter.

Pimen was an illiterate and a great dreamer. He had an extraordinarily joyful faith in God, and confidently awaited the end of "all lies" in the near future.

"Never you mind, dear friend, there'll soon be an end to lies. They'll devour one another and drown themselves." When he said this, his dull grey eyes turned blue, in a very strange manner, and burned and shone with a great joy, and they seemed to be just going to overflow, streaming blue rays.

He and I went to the bath-house one Saturday, and afterwards to a tavern for tea. Suddenly Pimen, raising his kindly eyes to mine, said:

"Wait a minute."

The hand with which he supported a saucerful of tea shook, he put the saucer down, and crossed himself, evidently listening to something.

"What is it, Pimen?"

"You see, dear friend, a divine thought touched my soul just now—and that means the Lord will soon be calling me to himself. . . ."

"Get along with you, you're perfectly healthy!"

"Silence!" he said gravely and joyously. "Not a word—I know."

On the following Thursday he was killed by a horse.

. . . The ten years from 1885 to 1896 in Nizhni-Novgorod may be called, without the slightest exaggeration, the "Korolenko era." But this has been said more than once in print.

A. A. Zarubin, owner of a distillery, and one of the town's "characters," a "reckless" bankrupt who ended his days a convinced Tolstoian and an advocate of temperance, told me in 1901:

"I understood during the time of Korolenko that I wasn't living the way I ought."

He was a little late in starting to reform his life—"during the time of Korolenko" he was over fifty, but he nevertheless changed it, or rather broke it up, in the Russian way.

"I was lying ill," he told me, "and my nephew Semyon came to see me. The one who is in exile, you know, he was a student then. 'Shall I read to you?' he said. And the book he read to me was *Makar's Dream*. It made me cry, it was so beautiful. So one man can take pity on another. From that moment I was a changed man. I called for my best friend, and said, here, you son of a bitch—read this! He read it and said it was

blasphemy. I was furious and told him what I thought of him, the scoundrel, and we became sworn enemies. And he held some promissory notes of mine and started pestering me, but I didn't care, I gave up my business, my soul rejected it. I was declared bankrupt and spent almost three years in gaol. In prison I said to myself: I've had enough of fooling. When they released me I went straight to Korolenko to ask him to teach me. But he wasn't in town. So I went to our Lev, to Tolstoi. 'It's like this,' I said. 'Good,' says he. 'Quite right.' That's that. And what made Gorinov come to his senses? Again Korolenko. And I know a lot of others who lived by his soul. We may be merchants, and live behind high walls, but the truth reaches us, too."

I value narratives of this sort highly, they show the paths by which the spirit of culture sometimes finds its way into the life and morals of savage tribes.

Zarubin was a ponderous greybeard, with small, dim eyes in a pink, chubby countenance. The pupils were very dark and bulgy, like beads. There was something obstinate in the expression of his eyes. He made for himself the reputation

of a "defender of law." The police wrongfully squeezed a kopek out of a man and Zarubin sent in a complaint about this action of the police. The complaint was declared groundless in two courts. The old man went to Petersburg, to the Senate, got hold of an order prohibiting the police from taking money from citizens, returned to Nizhni-Novgorod in triumph and carried the order to the office of the *Nizhegorodsky Listok* (*Nizhni-Novgorod Bulletin*), and asked them to print it. But the censor, by a ruling of the governor, had the order removed from the proof-sheets. Zarubin went to the governor, and asked him:

"Dost thou not" (he called everyone "thou") "acknowledge the law, friend?"

The order was printed.

He walked about the streets of the town in a long black coat, an absurd hat perched on his silvery locks, and high boots topped with velvet. Under his arm he carried a bulky brief-case containing the regulations of the "Temperance Society," and wads of complaints and petitions from citizens, tried to persuade cabbies to give up using foul language, interfered in all street rows, paid special attention to the behaviour

of the gendarmes and called his activities the "pursuance of truth."

The then famous priest Ioann Kronshtadtsky arrived at Nizhni-Novgorod. An enormous crowd of his admirers gathered in front of the church; Zarubin came up and asked: "What has happened?"

"They're waiting to see Ivan Kronshtadtsky come out."

"The actor from the imperial churches? Fools. . . ."

No one touched him. A believer took him by the sleeve, drew him aside and said urgently:

"Go away as quick as you can, for Christ's sake, Alexander Alexandrovich."

Ordinary townspeople treated him with respectful curiosity, and while there were some to call him a "fool," the majority, regarding the old man as their defender, expected of him miracles of some sort, never mind what, so long as they were displeasing to the municipal authorities.

In 1901 I was sent to prison. Zarubin, who did not then know me, went to Public Prosecutor Utin and demanded an interview with me.

"Are you a relative of the prisoner?" asked Utin.

"Never seen him, have no idea what he's like."

"You have no right to an interview."

"And have you read the New Testament? What does it say? How can you try people, good sir, if you don't know the New Testament?"

But the public prosecutor had a testament of his own, on the basis of which he refused the old man's strange request.

Zarubin, of course, was one of those—not rare—Russians who, at the end of a complicated life, when they have nothing more to lose, become "lovers of truth," and are really nothing but cranks.

The words of another merchant, N. A. Bugrov, were infinitely more significant—yes, and more fruitful. Millionaire, philanthropist, Old Believer, and a very clever man, he played the part of a sovereign prince in Nizhni-Novgorod. In a poetical mood he once complained:

"We merchants are neither wise nor strong nor clever folk. We haven't shaken off the nobility properly yet, and now there are others weighing us down, your Zemstvo members, or shepherds of Korolenko's type. Korolenko especially, he's a very disagreeable gentleman. Looks so simple, but everyone knows him, he gets in everywhere . . . ."

I heard this opinion as far back as the spring of 1893, when returning to Nizhni-Novgorod after prolonged travels in Russia and the Caucasus. During this period—nearly three years—the importance of V. G. Korolenko as a public figure and writer had become still greater. The part he played in the struggle with famine, his sturdy and successful opposition to the hot-tempered Governor Baranov, his "influence on the activities of the Zemstvo," were known far and wide. I think his *Hungry Year* had come out by then.

I remember the judgement on Korolenko given by a certain inhabitant of Nizhni-Novgorod, a most original man.

"In a cultured country this gubernia leader of opposition to authorities would have organized something like the Salvation Army or the Red Cross—something really important, international, and cultural. But in the amiable conditions of Russian life he will probably expend his energies on trifles. A pity, this is a very valuable gift bestowed by fate on poor beggars like us. A most original, quite new phenomenon, I can't think of anyone like him, or rather his equal, in our history."

"And what do you think of his literary talent?"

"I think he is not confident of his own powers—and that's too bad. He is a typical reformer in all the qualities of his mind and heart, but I rather think this prevents him from appreciating his own artistic gifts, although his qualities as a reformer should, combined with his talent, give him more self-confidence and audacity. I fear he regards himself as a writer 'among other things' and not 'first and foremost'. . . ."

These words were spoken by the prototype of a character in Boborykin's *On the Decline*—a dissipated, drunken, extremely cultivated and clever man. He was a misanthrope and never known to speak favourably, or even tolerantly, of anyone—this made me value his opinion of Korolenko the more.

But we will return to the years 1889 and 1890.

I did not visit Vladimir Galaktionovich, having made up my mind, as I have already said, to give up the attempt to write. I only met him occasionally in the street for a moment, or at gatherings in the houses of friends, where he maintained silence, listening calmly to the disputes. His calmness made me nervous. The ground seemed to be trembling beneath my feet,

and wherever I was—I could see that—a certain ferment seemed to be brewing. Everyone got excited, argued—on what ground did this man stand? I could not gather up courage to go up to him and ask: "What makes you so calm?"

My friends acquired new books—fat volumes of Redkin, and a still fatter *History of Social Systems* by Shcheglov, Marx's *Capital*, Lokhvitsky's book on constitutions, the lithographed lectures of V. Klyuchevsky, Korkunov, Sergeyevich.

A section of the younger people were fascinated by the iron logic of Marx, most of them eagerly read Bourget's novel *Le Disciple*, Senkevich's *Without Dogma*, Dedlov's *Sashenka*, and stories about "the new man." What was new in all these people was their outspoken aspiration towards individualism. This new tendency was very popular, and the young people hastened to put it into practice, ridiculing and harshly criticizing the "duty of the intellectuals" to solve social questions.

Some of these newly-fledged individuals found support for themselves in the determinism of the Marxist system.

A. F. Troitsky, an eloquent and fervent polemist,

who went to the Yaroslavl Ecclesiastical School and afterwards practised medicine in France, said:

"Historical necessity is just as mystical as the predestination taught by the church, just as oppressive and nonsensical as the popular belief in fate. Materialism is the bankruptcy of the mind, which is unable to embrace the diversity of life's phenomena, and reduces them clumsily to the single, simplest possible cause. Simplification is alien and hostile to nature. The law of its development is from the simple to the complex. The demand for simplification is our infantile disease, it only shows that the mind is as yet powerless, is incapable of harmonizing the whole sum, the chaos of phenomena."

There were some who were glad to find support in Adam Smith's dogma of the ego, a theory which satisfied them fully, and these became "materialists" in the ordinary, vulgar sense of the word. Most of them argued with more or less simplicity:

"If historical necessity, leading humanity along the path of progress, exists, then everything will develop independently of us."

And they whistled indifferently, thrusting their hands into their pockets. Present as mere

spectators at verbal battles, they looked on, like crows on a fence watching the furious fighting of cocks. The young people would laugh rudely, with ever-increasing frequency, at the "guardians of the heroic past." My feelings were on the side of these "guardians," who, though they might be cranks, were extraordinarily pure in spirit. I regarded them as something like saints in their enthusiasm for "the people," the object of their love, care, and endeavours. I saw what was heroic and comic in them, but I liked their romanticism, or rather, their social idealism. I could see that they painted "the people" in rosy colours, I knew that "the people" they talked about did not exist on the earth. The earth is inhabited by patient, cunning, short-sighted, selfish peasants, regarding everything that does not concern their own interests with suspicion and hostility; and by obtuse, roguish philistines with superstition and prejudice still more poisonous than the prejudices of the peasant; and there also works on the earth the hairy, sturdy merchant, gradually building up a well-nourished, complacently animal life.

In the chaos of conflicting and ever more hostile opinions, the struggle of mind and feeling, in

the battles from which, it seemed to me, truth emerged in a mutilated state—in this turmoil of ideas I could not find anything "near and dear" to me.

Returning home after each of these tempests, I jotted down some thoughts and aphorisms which had struck me by their form or content, recalling the gestures and poses of the speakers, the expressions of their faces, the gleam in their eyes. I was always rather disconcerted and amused by the delight felt by one or another after managing to deal a verbal blow at an opponent, to "touch him on the raw." It was strange to see how those who spoke of the good and the beautiful, of humanity and justice, resorted to the wiles of contentious discourse, not sparing one another's vanity, and frequently displaying an obvious desire to wound, as well as uncurbed irritation and rancour.

I did not possess the discipline, or rather the technique of thinking, which a school imparts; I accumulated material which required serious work, in its turn requiring leisure, another thing which I lacked. I was distracted by the contradictions between the books in which I firmly believed and life, which I could already claim to

know fairly well. I could see I was growing wiser, but felt that it was precisely this which was spoiling me. Like a carelessly loaded vessel I acquired a dangerous list. Anxious not to spoil the harmony of the choir, though possessing a cheerful tenor of my own, I did my utmost—as did many—to join in with an austere bass. This was hard for me, and put me in the false position of one who, in his desire to treat those around him with loving consideration, is untrue to himself.

Here, as in Kazan, Borisoglebsk, Tsaritsyn, my observations of the intellectuals filled me with consternation and anxiety. Most of the educated folk dragged out a hard, famished, humiliating existence, wasting valuable energy on the acquisition of a bare living, in the midst of an intellectual desert. It was this that upset me most of all. I saw that all these people, so variously gifted, were aliens in their own country, living in an atmosphere hostile to them, surrounded by suspicion and scorn. And this putrid swampy atmosphere was thick with the accursed "idiotic" trifles of life.

Again I was puzzled: how was it that the intellectuals did not make more energetic attempts

to penetrate into the masses, whose empty lives struck me as utterly useless, in their spiritual poverty, their strange tedium, and, above all, their callous cruelty to one another?

I painstakingly collected the rare crumbs of anything which could be called unusual—kind, disinterested, beautiful—and to this day memories of such signs of humanity in people sometimes come back to me. But I was spiritually hungry, and I could no longer be satisfied by the stifling poison of books. I needed rational work, heroic feats, revolt.

It was during this period that I had a memorable conversation with V. G. Korolenko.

I was seated one summer night on a bench on the Otkos, a high bank of the Volga, from where I had a good view of the desolate meadows of the Volga region, and, through the branches of trees, of the river. Suddenly, without my having noticed or heard anything, V. G. appeared beside me on the bench. I only became aware of his presence when he nudged me with his shoulder, saying: "You *were* deep in thought! I wanted to take your hat off, but I thought it might frighten you."

He lived a long way off, at the other end of the town. It was after two a.m. Obviously

fatigued, he sat there, his curly head uncovered, mopping his face with a handkerchief.

"You're out very late," he said.

"So are you."

"Yes. I should have said *we* are out very late. How are you, what are you doing?"

After a few trivial remarks he asked:

"They say you belong to Skvortsov's circle. What sort of a man is he?"

P. N. Skvortsov was then one of the best exponents of the Marxist theory, he never read anything but *Capital* and was proud of this. A year or two before the appearance of P. B. Struve's *Critical Notes* he read an article in the lawyer Shcheglov's drawing-room, expounding the same basic principles as those of Struve, but, as I well remember, more forcibly expressed. This article placed Skvortsov in the position of a heretic, which did not prevent him from getting up a circle of young people. Later, many of the members of this circle played an exceedingly important part in the organization of the S.-D. Party. Skvortsov was in very truth "not of this world." He was an ascetic, going about winter and summer in a thin coat and worn boots, and leading a half-famished existence, while

continually endeavouring to "reduce his demands," living for weeks on end on nothing but sugar, of which he ate six ounces a day, neither more nor less. This experiment in "rational diet" undermined his constitution and resulted in grave kidney disease.

He was short and insignificant in appearance, but in his light blue eyes there lurked the smile of a fortunate individual to whom a truth has been revealed with a completeness inaccessible to anyone else. He treated all who differed with him with a faint scorn, pitying but not offensive. He smoked thick cigarettes, rolled from cheap tobacco, thrusting them into a long (about 16 inches) bamboo holder, which he kept when not in use in his trouser belt, like a dagger.

I watched Pavel Nikolayevich Skvortsov in the midst of a herd of students who were making collective advances to a young lady visitor of unusual beauty. Skvortsov vied with the youthful dandies, and hung about the young lady too, majestically absurd with his cigarette-holder, all grey, in a cloud of stifling grey smoke. Standing in a corner of the room, his figure silhouetted against the white tiles of the stove, he emitted

with pedantic calm, in the accents of an Old Believer, a torrent of weighty words repudiating poetry, music, the drama, and dancing, and enveloping the beauteous damsel with clouds of smoke.

"Socrates said, long ago, that amusements are—harmful," he argued dogmatically.

The elegant, chestnut-haired young lady, in her blouse of flimsy white gauze, listened to him, swinging her charming foot flirtatiously, and gazing with strained politeness at the sage from beautiful dark eyes—no doubt with the same gaze which the beauties of Athens cast upon the snub-nosed Socrates. This glance asked, with dumb eloquence:

"When will you stop? When will you go away?"

He proved to her that Korolenko was a dangerous idealist and metaphysician, that literature—which he never read—was an "attempt at galvanizing the rotting corpse of Narodism." After proving this thoroughly, he at last thrust the cigarette-holder into his belt, and departed in triumph, and the young lady, following him with her eyes, threw herself in exhaustion—very gracefully, of course—on to the sofa, exclaiming plaintively:

"Good heavens—he's not a man, he's a foggy day!"

V. G. laughed, but heard me out in silence, looking at the river with narrowed eyes, and at last said, in soft, conciliatory tones:

"Don't be in a hurry to choose a faith, I say—choose, because it seems to me that nowadays people do not arrive at faith with effort, but simply choose one. See how rapidly materialism, so tempting in its simplicity, is coming into fashion! It is particularly enticing to people who are too lazy to think for themselves. Dandies accept it willingly, they like anything new, whether it suits their nature, tastes, and aspirations, or not."

He spoke meditatively, as if talking to himself, occasionally breaking off and listening to the snorts of an exhaust-pipe somewhere down below on the river-bank, and the sounds of sirens from the water.

He said that every rational attempt to explain the phenomena of life merits attention and respect, but that we should remember "life is made up of innumerable, strangely entangled curves," and that it is "excessively difficult to get it into a rectangular, logical framework."

"It is difficult to put these curves, these criss-crossing lines of human activities and relations, into even a semblance of order," he said, sighing and fanning himself with his hat.

I liked the simplicity of his speech and his gentle, meditative tone. But what he said of Marxism was essentially, though in other words, familiar to me. When he stopped speaking for a moment, I hastened to ask him what made him so calm and well-balanced.

He put on his hat, looked into my face, and answered, smiling:

"I know what I have to do, and am convinced of the usefulness of what I do. But—why do you ask me this?"

I then began to tell him of my bewilderment and anxieties. He moved a little away from me, leaning forward so that he could see my face better, and listened in attentive silence.

Then he said softly:

"There is a lot of truth in what you say. You're very observant."

And he chuckled, putting his hand on my shoulder.

"I never thought these questions would worry you. I was given quite a different idea of you. . . .

People call you a cheerful, rough chap, hostile to the intellectuals. . . ."

And he began using extremely strong language about the intellectuals. Always and everywhere, he said, they are isolated from the people, but that is because they are always in the vanguard, it is their historical mission.

"They are the yeast of all popular fermentation, the corner-stone of all new construction. Socrates, Giordano Bruno, Galileo, Robespierre, our own Decembrists, Perovskaya and Zhelyabov, all who are now starving in exile, together with those bending over a book this very night, preparing themselves for the struggle for justice, and, first and foremost, of course, for prison, they all represent the most active of life-forces, the most sensitive and the keenest of its weapons."

He rose to his feet in agitation and went on, striding up and down in front of the bench:

"Humanity began to make its own history from the moment when the first intellectual appeared on the scene. The myth of Prometheus is the story of a man who found a way of producing fire, thus with one blow distinguishing man from the beasts. You have rightly noted the faults

of the intellectuals—bookishness, the breach with life—but the question is, are these faults? Sometimes, to see aright, it is necessary, not to come nearer, but to move farther away. The great thing, and I give you the advice, as the older and more experienced, is to pay more attention to good qualities. We are all eager to find fault, it's so simple, and not without its advantages for each one of us. But Voltaire, who, genius as he was, was a bad man, nevertheless did a great deed when he defended the wrongfully accused. I am not speaking of the sinister superstitions he destroyed, but of his obstinate defence of what looked like a hopeless cause—there was a feat for you! He understood that man's first duty was to be humane. Justice is essential. When from tiny sparks it gradually becomes a mighty flame, it will purge the earth of filth and lies, and only then will life change its mournful, oppressive forms. Obstinately, regardless of self, of others, of everything, introduce justice into life—that is what we have to do."

He was obviously tired—he had been talking a long time—and sitting down again, he said, glancing up at the sky:

"It's getting late, or rather early—look, it's

quite light. And I think it's going to rain. Time to go home."

I lived close by, he—a mile or two away. I offered to see him home, and we walked along the streets of the drowsy town, beneath a sky dark with clouds.

"Well—are you writing anything?"

"No."

"Why not?"

"I have no time."

"Too bad. You'd find time if you wanted to. I sincerely believe—it seems to me—you have ability. You're out of humour, sir."

He went on to speak of the restless Gleb Uspensky, but suddenly a profuse summer shower broke out, enveloping the town in a silvery net. We sheltered in a gateway for a few minutes, but, seeing that the rain had set in for a long time, we parted. . . .

VLADIMIR KOROLENKO

WHEN I RETURNED to Nizhni-Novgorod from Tiflis, V. G. Korolenko was in Petersburg.

Not having any work on hand, I wrote a few short stories and sent them to Reinhardt's *Volzhsky Vestnik*, which the contributions of V. G. had made the most influential newspaper in the Volga region.

My stories were signed M. G. or G—y, and were quickly published, Reinhardt sending me a rather flattering letter and quite a lot of money—about thirty rubles. For some reason which I have now forgotten I jealously guarded the secret of authorship even from such close friends as N. Z. Vasilyev and A. I. Lanin. Since I attributed little importance to these stories myself it never occurred to me that they would determine my fate. But Reinhardt betrayed the author's identity to Korolenko, and when V. G. came

back from Petersburg I was told that he wanted to see me.

He was still living in the wooden house built by the architect Lemke on the outskirts of the town. I found him having tea in a little room looking out on the street, with flowers on the window-sills and in all the corners, and books and newspapers everywhere.

His wife and children had finished their tea and were going out for a walk. He seemed to me sturdier, more confident and curly-haired than ever.

"We've just been reading your story, *The Siskin*—well, so you've begun to appear in print—congratulations! I see you are obstinately determined to write allegories. Well, an allegory can be good, too, if wittily written, and obstinacy is not such a bad quality."

He said a few more kindly words, looking at me from narrowed eyes. His brow and neck were deeply tanned by the summer sun, and his beard was bleached. In his blue cotton shirt and leather belt, and his black trousers tucked into his high boots, he was like someone who had come from afar and would be moving on immediately. His wise, serene eyes shone with an inner gaiety.

I told him I had written several more stories, and that one had come out in the newspaper *Kavkaz (The Caucasus)*.

"Didn't you bring any with you? A pity! Your work is very original. What you write is not always quite co-ordinated—it's a bit uneven—but it's interesting. They say you're a great walker. I am, too, I roamed the Volga on foot almost the whole summer, went up the Kerzhenets and the Vetluga. Where were you?"

When I gave him a short outline of my rovings, he exclaimed approvingly:

"Aha! You've covered a lot of ground! That's why you've grown so mature in these last—how many years is it? Three? And you must have accumulated a lot of strength, too!"

I had only just read his story *The River Plays*, which had delighted me by its beauty and narrative. I felt a sensation of gratitude to the author, and began to speak about the story with enthusiasm.

I considered that in the ferryman Tyulin, Korolenko had given, with extraordinary skill and truth to life, the type of the peasant "hero for an hour." A person of that sort was capable of performing a magnanimous feat and immediate-

ly after of half-killing his wife, or breaking his neighbour's head with a stake. He could charm you with kindly smiles, and a torrent of cordial words, as vivid as blossoms, and suddenly, for no reason whatever, say something that was like kicking you in the face with a dirty boot. He was capable, like Kozma Minin, of organizing a people's movement, and then becoming a drunkard, a lost man.

V. G. listened to my confused speech without interrupting, gazing steadily at me, much to my embarrassment. Every now and then, closing his eyes, he struck the table with his hand, and after a time he rose from his seat and stood leaning against the wall, saying, with a good-humoured chuckle:

"You exaggerate. Let us simply say: it's a good story. That's quite enough. I will not deny that I like it myself. But as for what the peasant is like in a general way, and what Tyulin is like—of that I know nothing. But you speak very well, very vividly and clearly, your language is forcible—that's what you get for your praise! And one feels that you have seen a great deal, thought much. And I congratulate you on that from my soul. From my soul!"

He extended towards me a roughened hand, no doubt calloused by the oar or the axe. he was fond of chopping wood and of all forms of physical labour.

"Come on, now—what have you seen?"

I began telling him of the various seekers after truth I had come across in my journeyings, roaming in their hundreds from town to town, from monastery to monastery, over the winding roads of Russia.

Looking out of the window at the street, Korolenko said:

"They are mostly loafers. Unsuccessful heroes, disgustingly enamoured of themselves. Have you noticed that they are almost all bad-tempered? The majority of them seek by no means the 'sacred truth,' but an easy living, and the chance to become a hanger-on."

These words, so calmly uttered, struck me, immediately revealing to me a truth I had vaguely felt myself.

"Some of them can spin a good yarn," continued Korolenko. "They are people with a wealth of language. Their talk often sounds as smooth as silk."

"Searchers after truth," these were the favourite characters of Narodist biographical litera-

ture. And here was Korolenko dubbing them loafers, and bad-tempered into the bargain! This sounded almost like blasphemy, but on the lips of V. G. it carried weight and conviction. And his words fortified my sense of this man's spiritual independence.

"You've never been to Volhynia or Podolia? Lovely places!"

When I told him of my enforced conversation with Ioann Kronshtadtsky, he exclaimed eagerly:

"What d'you think of him? What sort of man is he?"

"A man who really believes, the way some simple village priests do, from a good, honest heart. I rather think his own popularity frightens him, it's too much for him. He gives you a feeling that things are quite haphazard with him, that he does not act of his own will. He keeps asking his God all the time—is that right, Lord? And he's afraid all the time—it isn't."

"That's strange hearing," said V. G. thoughtfully.

He then proceeded to tell me of his conversations with the Lukoyanov peasants, the Kerzhenets dissenters, managing to bring out, with subtle, apt humour the amusing combina-

tions of ignorance and cunning in their speech, and skilfully indicating the common sense of the peasant, his canny mistrust of strangers.

"I sometimes think that nowhere in the world is there such a varied spiritual life as here in Russia. Even if this is going too far, it can safely be said that the characters of those who think and believe are infinitely and discordantly varied in our country."

He spoke gravely of the necessity for a close study of spiritual life in the countryside.

"This will never be exhausted by ethnographers," he declared. "We must approach it quite differently, closer, more deeply. The village—the soil from which we all spring, brings forth many useless weeds, too. To sow seed in this soil, caution is needed no less than energy. This very summer I talked to a far from stupid youth who, nevertheless, assured me in all seriousness that the growth of the kulak in the village is a progressive sign, because, forsooth, the kulaks accumulate capital and Russia needs to become a capitalist country. If this sort of propaganda reaches the villages. . . ."

He laughed.

Seeing me out, he again wished me luck.

"What do you think—can I write?" I asked.

"Of course you can!" he exclaimed, somewhat surprised. "Why, you're writing already, and getting your stuff printed—what more do you want? If you need advice, bring your manuscripts, we'll discuss them."

I went away from him feeling thoroughly braced, like one who, after a hot day and great fatigue, has had a dip in the cool waters of a woodland stream.

V. G. Korolenko evoked in me powerful sentiments of respect, but for some reason or other I did not really feel drawn to him, and this worried me. No doubt this was due to the fact that I was just then rather tired of teachers and instructors, and was longing for a rest from them, for friendly, simple converse with some sympathetic soul on the things which were harassing me. But every time I brought a host of impressions to my teachers, they would begin shaping and stitching what I had written according to the fashions and traditions of the politico-philosophical firms whose cutters and tailors they were. I could see they were honestly incapable of sewing and shaping in any other way, but I saw that they were spoiling my material.

A fortnight later I brought Korolenko my fairy-tale *The Fisherman and the Fairy*, and the story *Old Izergil*, which I had just finished. V. G. was not at home, so I left the manuscripts, and the next day I had a note from him: "Come round in the evening for a talk. Vladimir Korolenko."

He met me on the steps with an axe in his hand.

"Don't think this is my instrument of criticism," he said, brandishing the axe. "I've only been putting up some shelves in a closet. But a certain amount of punishment is in store for you. . . ."

His face shone with good humour, his eyes smiled, and he smelt of freshly-baked bread, like some robust, healthy Russian countrywoman.

"I wrote all night, and had a nap after dinner. And I woke up with the feeling that I must find something to do."

He seemed quite different from the man I had seen a fortnight before. I no longer had the slightest feeling that he was a teacher and instructor. Before me stood a nice person in a mood of friendly interest in the whole world.

"Well," he began, picking up from the table

my manuscripts, and smiting his knee with them. "I've read your fairy-tale. If it had been written by some young lady who had been spending too much time reading the poetry of Musset, and that, moreover, in the translation of dear old Madame Mysovskaya, I would say to that young lady: 'Not bad, but you'd better get married, you know.' But for a ferocious gawk like you to write tender verses is almost infamous, it is, to say the least of it, criminal. When did you manage to do it?"

"While I was in Tiflis."

"So that's it! The whole thing reeks of pessimism. Remember—a pessimistic attitude to love is greensickness, it's a theory more contrary to all practice than any other. We know you—you pessimists, we've heard of you before!"

He winked slily at me, chuckled, and went on seriously:

"The only thing to be done with an elegy like this is to publish the verses separately, they're quite original—I'll get that done for you. *Old Izergil* is a bit better, more solid, but there you are—another of your allegories! They won't lead to any good. Ever been in prison? You have? Well, you're sure to land there again."

After a pause he said, turning over the pages of the manuscript:

"Very queer this! It's romanticism, and that came to an end long ago. I greatly doubt whether this Lazarus is worth raising from the dead. I feel as if you were not being yourself in your writing. You're a realist, not a romantic—a realist! There's one place in particular, about that Pole, that seems to me quite personal—don't you agree?"

"You may be right."

"Aha! So you see! I tell you—we know something about you people! And you must get rid of everything personal—that's quite intolerable. Of course I mean what is narrowly personal."

He spoke easily, gaily, and his eyes shone delightfully—I gazed at him in amazement, as if I had never seen him before. Flinging the manuscript on to the table, he turned towards me and put his hand on my knee.

"Look here—may I be quite frank with you? I hardly know you, I've heard a lot about you, and I can see something for myself. You're not living the way you should. You're not in the right atmosphere. I think you ought to go away, or marry some nice, clever girl."

"But I am married."

"That's just what's the matter."

I told him that I preferred not to discuss this.

"Sorry!"

He began joking, and then said, abruptly, in worried tones:

"Oh, did you know that Romas had been arrested? Quite a long time ago? I only heard it yesterday. In Smolensk? What was he doing there?"

The Narodnoye Pravo (People's Right) printshop, which Romas ran in his own home, was closed down by the police.

"A restless chap," said V. G. thoughtfully. "Now they'll send him away again. How is he—all right? He used to be a very sturdy fellow."

He sighed, shrugging his broad shoulders.

"All that's not what is wanted. Nothing can be done that way. The Astyryev case is a good lesson. It tells us—take up ordinary 'legitimate' work, for everyday cultural purposes. The autocracy is a decaying tooth, but it is still strong and its roots are deep and spreading, it is not for our generation to draw it—we must make it shaky first, and that alone will take years of 'legitimate' work."

He went on speaking about this for a long time and it was evident that the subject was one in which he had a living faith.

Avdotya Semyonovna came in, the children raised a din, and I rose, leaving them with good feelings in my heart.

It is well known that walls are of glass in the provinces—everyone knows all about you, knows what you were thinking about at two o'clock on Wednesday, and just before midnight service on Saturday. Everyone knows your most secret intentions and feels greatly annoyed if you fail to justify the prophetic surmises and expectations of those around you.

Of course the whole town knew that Korolenko liked me and I had to listen to all sorts of advice of the following nature:

"Look out! You'll have your head turned by that lot—they're too clever by half!"

The allusion was to the then popular story by P. D. Boborykin, *Come to His Senses,* about a revolutionary who took legal work in the Zemstvo after which he lost his umbrella and his wife left him.

"You're a democrat, you have nothing to

learn from generals—you're a son of the people," they told me.

But I had long felt myself to be a stepson of the people, a feeling which time had only increased, and, as I have already said, the Narodniks themselves seemed just as much stepsons as I was. When I pointed this out, they scolded me.

"You see—you're already infected."

A group of students in the Yaroslavl Lyceum invited me to a party. I read them something, they poured vodka into my glass of beer, secretly, hoping I would not notice. But I saw through their little wiles, and understood that they wanted to make me dead drunk, but what I could not make out was *why* they should want this. One of them, a conceited, consumptive fellow, assured me:

"The great thing is to send all ideas, ideals and that stuff to the devil. Write simply! Down with ideas!"

I was thoroughly sick of all this advice.

V. G. Korolenko, like every conspicuous individual, was the target of all sorts of attempts on the part of ordinary people. There were some, sincerely appreciative of his cordial attitude to people, who endeavoured to involve the writ-

er in their petty private squabbles, while others tried out mild slander on him. My own friends did not like his stories much.

"That Korolenko of yours actually believes in God," I was told.

For some reason or other they particularly disliked *Following the Icon*, considering it nothing but "ethnography."

Even Pavel Yakushkin wrote about it in this spirit. They insisted that the shoemaker hero of the story was filched from G. Uspensky's *Morals of Rasteryaeva Street*. These critics reminded me of a Voronezh priest who, after hearing a detailed description of the travels of Miklukho-Maklai, asked indignantly:

"You say he brought a Papuan to Russia! Why a Papuan? And why only one?"

Early one morning, going home after roving the countryside all night, I came upon V. G. on the porch of his home.

"Where did you spring from?" he asked in surprise. "I am going for a walk, it's a lovely morning. Come with me."

Apparently he too had not slept all night—his eyes were red-rimmed and dry, they looked

weary, his beard was tangled, and he was carelessly dressed.

"I read your *Grandad Arkhip* in *Volgar*—not bad, the sort of thing one can print in a magazine. Why didn't you show it to me before having it published? And why don't you ever come to see me?"

I told him that I had been put off by the gesture with which he had given me a loan of three rubles, stretching out his hand in silence, with his back to me. I had been hurt. Borrowing money is so unpleasant, and I only resorted to it when in dire necessity.

He thought it over with a darkened brow.

"I don't remember it. Since you say it was so it must have been. But you ought to forgive me a little thing like that. I suppose I was in a bad mood, I often have been lately. I suddenly get thinking, and then I might as well be at the bottom of a well. I see nothing, and only strain myself trying to hear something."

Taking my arm he looked into my eyes.

"Forget it. You have no reason to be hurt, I have the very best feelings towards you, and it's by no means a bad thing that you took offence. We're not very easily hurt, and that's

all wrong. Come, forget it. I have something to tell you—you write too much, too hastily, one constantly comes across unfinished, muddled places in your stories. The description of rain in *Arkhip* is neither in verse nor in rhythmic prose. That's bad."

He spoke to me long and in detail of other stories of mine and it was obvious that he read everything by me that he came across with the utmost attention. Naturally this touched me deeply.

"We must help one another," he said in reply to my thanks. "There are not many of us. And we all have our difficulties."

Lowering his voice, he asked:

"Have you heard, is it true that some girl called Istomina is mixed up in the Romas case?"

I knew this girl, having made her acquaintance by fishing her out of the Volga when she tried to throw herself into the water from the stern of a boat. It was quite easy to get her out, she had chosen a very shallow place. She was a colourless, dull creature with a tendency to hysteria and a morbid fondness for lying. Later I think she became a governess in the family of the Stolypins in Saratov, and was one of those

killed by the bomb thrown by a Maximalist, when the minister's country residence on the Aptekarsky Island was blown up.

After hearing what I had to tell him, V. G. said, almost angrily:

"It's a crime to involve children like that in such a risky affair. I met that girl four years ago, or it may have been more. My impression of her is different from yours. Just a sweet girl, pained by the obvious injustice of life, she might have made a good village schoolmistress. They say she gave things away under interrogation. But what could she have known? I can see no justification for sacrificing children to the Baal of politics."

He quickened his pace, and I, whose feet were sore, stumbled and fell behind.

"What's the matter with you?"

"Rheumatism."

"Too early! In my opinion you spoke all wrong about the girl. But on the whole you tell things well. Look here—try and write something longer, for the magazine. The time has come for this. They'll publish it and I hope you'll begin taking yourself more seriously."

I don't remember him ever speaking to me

again with such charm as on that glorious morning, after two days of uninterrupted rain, amidst the freshened fields.

We sat long on the edge of the gully beside the Jewish cemetery, admiring the emerald dewdrops on the foliage of the trees and on the blades of grass, he telling me of the tragicomic life of the Jews "within the pale," while the shadows of fatigue beneath his eyes grew heavier and heavier.

Nine o'clock had already struck by the time we returned to the town. Taking leave of me, he reminded me of what he had said:

"So you will try to write a long story, won't you?"

I went home and sat down immediately to write *Chelkash*, the story of an Odessa tramp, my neighbour in the ward of the hospital in the town of Nikolayev. I wrote for two days and sent V. G. the rough copy of my manuscript.

A day or two later he congratulated me warmly.

"That's not a bad thing you sent me! It's quite a good story. Cut out of whole cloth. . . ."

I was much embarrassed by his praise.

That evening, seated astride a chair in his tiny study, he said eagerly:

"Not at all bad! You know how to create characters, your people speak and act of themselves, out of their own being, you manage not to interfere with the current of their thought, the play of their feelings, and it's not everyone who can do that. And best of all you take people as you find them. I said you were a realist."

But after a pause he chuckled and added:

"But at the same time you're a romantic. And look here! You've only been sitting here a quarter of an hour, and this is your fourth cigarette."

"I'm very nervous."

"You shouldn't be. You're nervous all the time, and that's probably why people say you drink much. You're nothing but skin and bone;—you shouldn't smoke, it gives you no pleasure—what's wrong with you?"

"I don't know."

"And about your drinking—is it true?"

"All lies!"

"And that you have all sorts of orgies. . . ."

He gazed steadily at me, laughing, and re-

peated some skilfully woven gossip he had heard about me.

Then he uttered the memorable words:

"As soon as anyone makes himself the very least conspicuous, people knock him on the head —just to make sure. . . . This was said by a student. But joking apart, never mind how they treat you. We'll bring out *Chelkash* in *Russkoye Bogatstvo* (*Russian Wealth*), right in front, that'll be a little distinction, an honour. There are a few grammatical skirmishes in it, which spoil it, I've settled them. Otherwise I haven't touched it—like to have a look?"

Of course I refused.

Pacing the small room he said, rubbing the palms of his hands together:

"Your success has made me very happy."

I felt the entrancing sincerity of his happiness, and could only admire this man who spoke about literature exactly as if he were speaking of some woman whom he loved with a calm firm love, for ever. I have never forgotten how happy I felt, alone with this pilot, and I watched his eyes silently. So much joy for another shone in them.

Joy for another is what people so seldom feel, and yet it is the greatest joy on earth.

V. G. Korolenko

1896

Coming to a halt in front of me, Korolenko placed his heavy hands on my shoulders.

"Look here—why not go away from this place. You might go to Samara, for instance. I have a friend on the *Samara Gazette*. If you like I'll write and ask him to give you work, shall I?"

"Why, am I in anybody's way here?"

"Other people are in *your* way."

It was obvious that he believed the stories about my drinking, "orgies in the bath-house" and my "vicious" ways, the chief of which was poverty. V. G.'s insistent advice that I should leave the town rather hurt my feelings, but at the same time his desire to extricate me from the "abyss of vice" touched me.

With some emotion I told him about my life, he listening in silence, frowning and shrugging his shoulders.

"But you can see for yourself that all this is impossible," he said. "What have you to do with all this absurdity? No, you listen to me. You simply must go away, change your way of living. . . ."

I took his advice.

Afterwards, when I was writing bad daily stories for the *Samara Gazette* over the good pseudonym "Yegudiil Khlamida," Korolenko wrote me letters in which he criticized my atrocious work mockingly, solemnly, severely, but always in the spirit of friendship.

One incident stands out vividly in my memory.

I was mortally sick of a certain poet who bore the disastrously appropriate surname of Skukin.* He was always sending verses a yard long to the paper, all of them incurably ungrammatical and hopelessly trivial, quite impossible to print. The thirst for glory inspired this man with an original idea—he had his verses printed on sheets of pink paper and circulated them among the food stores for the salesmen to wrap up their packets of tea, boxes of sweets, tins of sardines, ounces of sausage in, so that the customer received a few feet of poetry, in which the municipal authorities, the marshal of nobility, the city governor and the bishop were lauded to the skies with the utmost solemnity, by way of a premium on his purchases.

* *Skukin* derives from the word *boredom* (*skuka*).—*Tr.*

All of these notables were in their own way noteworthy and fully deserving of attention, but the bishop was a particularly conspicuous figure. He had forcibly baptized a Tatar girl, thus almost causing a riot among the Tatars throughout the district, and had got up an idiotic lawsuit against the Khlisty,* in which, as I very well knew, perfectly innocent persons were convicted. His most glorious achievement was as follows: while he was touring the diocese one day of bad weather his carriage broke down in the vicinity of a tiny, remote hamlet and he was compelled to take shelter in a peasant hut. There, on the shelf beside the icon, he saw greatly to his astonishment a plaster bust of Jove. Inquiries and a tour of inspection of other huts brought to light the fact that several other households owned an image of the ruler of Olympus and even a statuette of Venus, while nobody would say where the idols had come from.

This afforded sufficient material for a criminal lawsuit against a sect of Samara heathens, worshipping the gods of ancient Rome. The pagans were thrown into prison where they remained

* A religious sect.—*Tr.*

until investigations showed that they had killed and robbed a man from the soldiers' settlement in Vyatka, peddling plaster objects. After killing the peddler these people had shared out his goods in a friendly spirit—that was all.

In a word—I was dissatisfied with the governor, the bishop, the town, the universe, myself, and with a great deal besides. And so, in a state of rage and irritation, I abused the poet who belauded what to me was so detestable.

V. G. immediately sent me a long, admonitory letter, pointing out that even when abusing people one should observe the decencies. It was a good letter, but it was taken away by the police when they raided my room, and it was lost with Korolenko's other letters to me.

A word about the police.

Early in the spring of 1897 I was arrested in Nizhni-Novgorod and conveyed, with no particular ceremony, to Tiflis. There, in Metekhi Castle, Captain Konissky, later head of the Petersburg police, said dully, during the interrogation:

"What fine letters Korolenko wrote you—and you know, he's now the foremost writer in Russia."

This captain was a queer fish—small, with furtive, cautious, unconfident gestures, a monstrous nose with a melancholy droop, and—quite out of keeping with the rest of his face—alert eyes, the pupils of which seemed to be hiding behind the bridge of his nose.

"I'm a countryman of Korolenko's, I'm from Volhynia, too, a descendant of that Bishop Konissky who, if you remember, addressed Catherine the Second with a speech about the sun. I'm proud of him."

I asked him politely which of them he was prouder of, his ancestor or his countryman.

"Of both, of course—of both."

His eyes seemed to disappear altogether towards the bridge of his nose, but he sniffed loudly, and they returned to their proper place. Since I was unwell, and therefore irritable, I remarked that I could not understand why he should be proud of a man continually distinguished by the attentions of the police.

"Each of us fulfils the will of the Supreme Being," he remarked piously. "Let us proceed. So you maintain . . . and yet we are aware. . . ."

We were sitting in a small underground room at the entrance to the castle. The window was

very high up in the wall, almost at the ceiling, a hot sunbeam slanted through it on to the table with its heaps of papers, and—to my horror—lit up a scrap of paper on which I had written a few words in a clear hand.

Glancing at this accursed paper I thought to myself:

"What shall I say to the captain if he asks me the meaning of this rigmarole?"

For six years—from 1895 to 1901—I did not see Vladimir Korolenko, and we only exchanged a few letters during this period.

In 1901 I went for the first time to Petersburg—the town of straight lines and ill-defined people. I was "the fashion," I had acquired "fame," which became a great nuisance to me. My popularity struck deep roots. I remember, while crossing the Anichkov Bridge one evening, being overtaken by two men, apparently hairdressers, one of whom, looking into my face, said in frightened undertones to his companion:

"Look—it's Gorky!"

The other stood still, inspected me from head to foot, and exclaimed enthusiastically, stepping aside to allow me to pass him:

"The devil! He wears galoshes!"

Among innumerable other pleasures, I was photographed with the members of the editing staff of the *Nachalo* (*Beginning*), a group which included M. Gurovich, the agent provocateur and stool-pigeon.

Naturally it gave me exceeding pleasure to be met by women with indulgent smiles, and to catch almost adoring glances from the eyes of young girls, and no doubt, like any other youth suddenly overtaken by fame, I resembled a peacock.

But of a night, all alone with myself, I would sometimes suddenly feel like an uncaught criminal. He is surrounded by spies, judges, prosecutors—all behaving as if they regarded crime as a misfortune, a regrettable "youthful error" —just own up and they will magnanimously forgive you. But in the depths of their hearts each of them cherishes an irresistible desire to catch the criminal, to cry triumphantly in his face: "Got you!"

I often found myself in the position of a pupil sitting for a public examination in all branches of knowledge.

"What is your belief?" the sectarians and high priests of religion would ask me searchingly.

Being a polite individual I submitted to these examinations, displaying a patience which astonished myself, but after the torture by interrogation I would feel a desire to run the steeple of the Admiralty through the dome of St. Isaac's, or perpetrate some other mischievous trick.

Somewhere beneath all this good humour there was almost always something false, the Russians concealed something akin to insolence. This quality—or shall I call it this method of investigation?—is expressed in diverse forms, mainly in the attempt to invade one's neighbour's mind as if it were a side-show at a fair, to see how the tricks are performed in it, to juggle, trample, clutter up the mind of another with trifles, and occasionally to overturn something in it. And, like doubting Thomas, to thrust fingers into wounds, apparently seeing no difference between the scepticism of an apostle and the inquisitiveness of a monkey.

Even in stony Petersburg V. G. Korolenko found for himself an ancient wooden house, full of provincial comfort, with painted floors—a house fragrant with the kindly aroma of age.

During these years V. G. had turned grey and the fringe of grey hair at either temple was almost white; there were wrinkles beneath his eyes, and his glance was weary and abstracted. I could see at once that the tranquillity I had liked so much had been replaced by the nervousness of a man whose spiritual forces were strained to the utmost. Evidently the Multan* affair had cost him dear. . . .

"I suffer from insomnia—it gives me no peace. And you, do you smoke as much as ever, despite the tuberculosis? How are your lungs? I intend going to the Black Sea—shall we go together?"

He seated himself at the table opposite me, and peering at me from behind the samovar began talking about my work.

"You're better at things like *Varenka Olesova* than you are at *Foma Gordeyev*. That novel makes stiff reading, it's chock-full of stuff, but there's very little order or grace in it."

* Libellous, framed trial (1892-96), got up by the tsarist police against a group of Udmurt peasants, from the village of Stary Multan, Vyatka Gubernia. Korolenko came out in defence of the peasants.—*Tr.*

He straightened himself so that his very spine creaked, and asked:

"Well—have you turned Marxist?"

When I told him I was very near to this, he smiled glumly, and said:

"It's a muddle to me. Socialism without idealism—I can't understand that. And I don't believe the consciousness of common material interests is enough to build up an ethical system on—we can't get on without ethics."

Between sips of tea he inquired:

"Well, how d'you like Petersburg?"

"The town is more interesting than the people in it."

"The people here—"

He raised his eyebrows, rubbing his weary eyes hard with his fingers.

"The people here are more European than the Moscow people, or our Volga folk. They say Moscow's more individual—I don't know. It seems to me that its individuality is nothing but clumsy, oafish conservatism. There they have Slavophiles, Katkov and that lot, and we have Decembrists, Petrashevskians and Chernyshevsky."

"And Pobedonostsev," I put in.

"Marxists," he went on, chuckling. "And all sorts of progressive or, to be more precise, revolutionary ideas. But Pobedonostsev has talent, say what you will. Have you read his *Moskovsky Sbornik* (*Moscow Miscellanies*)? It's called *Moscow*, by the way."

Immediately he was all nervous animation, giving me a humorous account of the struggles between the literary circles, the disputes of the Narodniks and Marxists.

I knew something about all this already, for the day after I set foot in Petersburg I was drawn into an affair which to this day I cannot remember without disagreeable sensations. Indeed it had been partly to talk about this that I had come to V. G.

It was like this.

V. A. Posse, the editor of the magazine *Zhizn* (*Life*), got up a literary evening to celebrate the memory of N. G. Chernyshevsky, in which V. G. Korolenko, N. K. Mikhailovsky, P. F. Melshin, P. B. Struve, M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky and a few other Marxists and Narodniks had been invited to participate. The writers had given their consent, the police—their permission.

The day after my arrival in Petersburg I was visited by two dandified students and a flirtatious young lady, who declared that they could not agree to the participation of Posse in a Chernyshevsky evening, for: "Posse was not liked by the students, he exploited the editing staff of *Zhizn*." I had known Posse for over a year and while considering him both original and gifted, I did not believe he was original and gifted enough to exploit the editing staff of *Zhizn*. I knew that his relations with the staff were comradely, that he himself worked like a horse, and that he and his large family led a half-starved existence on his miserable salary. When I told the young people this, they spoke of Posse's vague political position, betwixt the Narodniks and the Marxists, a thing which he, by the way, thoroughly understood, and therefore signed his articles by the pseudonym of Vilde. The guardians of morality and faith were angered by what I said and withdrew, declaring that they should go to all those who were to take part in the celebrations and persuade them to refrain from speaking.

It subsequently turned out that in its essence this incident was to be regarded not as a person-

al attack on Posse, but as "one of the acts in the struggle between two tendencies in political thought." The youthful Marxists considered that it was not suitable for the representatives of their school to appear before the public together with the representatives of a "worn out, moribund" Narodism. All this wisdom was expounded in an epistle as lengthy as a pamphlet, and so written that it seemed to me I was reading a foreign language. After receiving this letter from people with whom I was not acquainted, I had a note from P. B. Struve, informing me that he had refused to speak at the celebrations, and a few hours later another note saying that he had taken back his refusal. And the next day M. I. Tugan-Baranovsky refused and Struve sent yet another note, this time with a decisive refusal, and, as in the first two, without giving the slightest motive.

V. G. laughed as he listened to my account of all this fuss and said with rueful humour:

"There you are—they ask you to read, and when you get on to the platform they take down your trousers and give you a good thrashing."

Pacing to and fro, his hands folded behind him, he continued in low, thoughtful tones:

"Difficult times! There is something queer and demoralizing in the atmosphere. I can't understand rhe mood of the young ones, it seems to me that nihilism is springing up among them, and socialist-careerists have begun to make their appearance. The autocracy is ruining Russia and it's hard to see what force could take its place."

Never before had I seen Korolenko so worried and so weary. It was very sad.

Just then some Zemstvo men from the country arrived, and I took my departure. A few days later he went somewhere for a holiday and I cannot remember if I ever met him again.

My meetings with him were very few, I never observed him uninterruptedly, day after day, even for the very shortest period of time.

But every talk I had with him strengthened the impression I had of V. G. Korolenko as a great humanitarian. I have never met among cultivated Russians anyone with such a thirst for "truth and justice," anyone feeling so strongly the necessity for embodying truth in life.

After the death of L. N. Tolstoi, he wrote to me:

"Tolstoi, like no one ever before, increased the number of thinking, believing people. It

seems to me you are wrong when you say this increase was brought about at the expense of active people, or those capable of activity. Human thought is always active, only arouse it, and its aspirations will be towards truth and justice."

I feel certain that the cultural work of V. G. aroused the slumbering awareness of truth in a vast number of Russian people. He gave himself to the cause of justice with an unusual, single-minded intensity in which thought and feeling, harmoniously blended, rise to a profound religious passion. He seemed to have seen and felt justice, which, like all man's highest dreams, is a mist created by the spirit of man, striving towards embodiment in tangible form.

To the detriment of his artistic talent he gave his energies to an incessant, indefatigable struggle against the hydra-headed monster which was nourished by the fantastic nature of life in Russia.

The austere forms of revolutionary thought and deed perplexed and tortured his heart—the heart of a man passionately enamoured of beauty and justice, and seeking to blend them in a single unit. But he believed firmly in that the

creative forces of the country would soon blossom out, and foresaw that the miracle of the awakening of the people from the dead would be a great miracle.

In 1908 he wrote:

"Everything now being done will bring about in a few years a volcanic eruption, and those will be terrible days. This will only come about if the soul of the people is alive, and that soul *is* alive."

In 1887 he finished his story *During the Eclipse* with these verses by N. Berg:

Cocks are crowing over Holy Russia,
Soon will Holy Russia see her dawn!

All his life, the hard life of a hero, he went to meet the day, and what was done by V. G. Korolenko for the hastening of the dawn of this day is incalculable.

M. M. KOTSUBINSKY

1911-12

MIKHAIL KOTSUBINSKY*

"PERFECTION is rare," wrote the Goncourts. Kotsubinsky was one of those rare people who, at the very first meeting, make you feel: this is just the man I was wanting to meet, just the man for whom I have been cherishing certain very special thoughts.

He is quite at home in the spiritual world of the beautiful and the good, and from the very first meeting he arouses a longing to meet him again as often as possible, to talk to him as long as possible.

While there is nothing on which he has not meditated, it is the good to which he is closest,

* Mikhail Mikhailovich Kotsubinsky (1864-1913)—a prominent Ukrainian writer. His best work—*Fata Morgana*—deals with the peasant movement in the Ukraine during 1905-07.—*Tr.*

and a fastidious aversion to the bad is inherent in him. The aesthetic intuition for what is good is subtly developed in him, he loves the good with the love of the artist, believes in its victorious power, there dwells in him the feeling of a citizen who understands with profundity and versatility the cultural significance, the historical value of the good. Once, while telling him of a plan for the organization in Russia of a democratic publishing enterprise on a big scale, I heard his gentle voice and thoughtful words:

"A 'Journal of the Phenomena of the Humane' should be issued annually—a sort of review of all man's efforts during the preceding year to forward the happiness of mankind. It would be a wonderful handbook in which people could get to know themselves and one another. We're more familiar with what is bad than with what is good, you know. And its issues would be of extraordinary importance for democracy. . . ."

He was very fond of speaking about democracy, about the people, and there was always something particularly pleasing and instructive in what he said.

One quiet evening I told him the legend of the Calabrian who, during Sicily's struggle

in 1849 against Ferdinand Bomba, approached the virtuous Ruggero Settimo with the innocent proposal:

"Signor, if the Neapolitan tyrant conquers, he will no doubt cut off your head, won't he? Then, Signor, offer him three heads for your one head—namely, my own head, and those of my brother and brother-in-law. We all detest Bomba as you do, Signor, but we are insignificant folk, we cannot struggle for liberty as wisely and skilfully as you. It seems to me that the people will profit greatly by this measure, and Bomba will no doubt kill three instead of one with the greatest pleasure. He likes killing people, the idler! We will joyfully give our lives for liberty."

Mikhail Mikhailovich liked the legend. He said, his eyes twinkling affectionately:

"Democracy is always romantic, and that's a good thing, you know. After all romanticism is the most humane attitude known to man. It seems to me that its cultural significance is not sufficiently appreciated. It exaggerates, of course. But it always exaggerates on the side of the good, proving how great the thirst for the good is in human beings."

Another memory: a huge German sheep-dog had its first litter of puppies in great agony. The puppies were still-born. The dog, half dead with pain, aroused the most obvious sympathy of a fox-terrier bitch, which had not yet had its puppies.

This elegant little creature astonished us by the intensity of its emotions. Trotting round the sheep-dog with low wails, it licked the tears of anguish from the latter's eyes, and actually wept itself. Then, rushing to the kitchen, it seized a bone and tore back with it to the sufferer, after which it ran up to those who were standing round, and, with soft and plaintive barks, jumped up to them as if begging for help, still weeping, the tears streaming from its beautiful eyes. It was very touching, and even a little eerie.

"Extraordinary!" exclaimed Kotsubinsky, deeply moved. "The only way in which I can explain to myself the dog's strength of feeling is that human beings have managed to create a powerful and impressive atmosphere of humanity, capable of moulding the nature even of an animal, and instilling in it something of a human soul."

Humanity, beauty, the people, the Ukraine—such were the favourite subjects of Kotsubinsky's conversation, they were as inseparable from him as his own heart, his brain, and his beautiful, loving eyes.

He loved flowers and, while as full of information about them as a botanist, spoke of them as a poet. It was a pleasure to see him holding a flower in his hand, stroking it and talking about it.

"Look! The orchid has assumed the form of a bee. It is trying in this way to say it does not need to be visited by insects. How much mind everywhere, how much beauty!"

His weak heart prevented him from walking over the uneven paths of Capri, over the sun-scorched rocks, in the heated air, heavily laden with the scent of flowers, but he did not spare himself and walked a great deal, often to the point of exhaustion.

And if anyone said to him: "Why do you let yourself get tired?" he would reply, brushing aside the reasonable advice:

"I must see all there is to be seen. I haven't long to live on the earth, and—I love it."

He loved his native Ukraine with a particu-

lar love and was always imagining he could smell savory in places where it did not grow.

And one day, catching sight of a clump of pale pink hollyhocks by the white wall of a fisherman's hut, his face was lit up with a smile and he took off his hat to the flowers, saying in the Ukrainian language:

"Greetings, friends! How do you get on in a strange land?"

Then, slightly abashed, he turned it off with a joke:

"I seem to be getting a bit sentimental. But you too, probably, often miss the branches of your white-trunked birch-trees, the ones they used to thrash you with, don't you? Oh, we're all human, and if anyone isn't, he should be ashamed of himself!"

Capri he loved.

"I don't feel well," he wrote. "I'm only well when I'm at Capri. Nature there is so harmonious, and acts so favourably on my spirit that it is my best cure."

But I do not think this was quite true, the hothouse atmosphere of the island was not good for him. Besides, his Ukrainian heart was al-

ways in his native land, he lived in its sorrows, suffered with its sufferings.

Sometimes one could see him walking slowly, slightly stooped, his gleaming head bare, with that contemplative expression he has in Zhuk's portrait, and then one could guess: he is thinking of his Chernigov district.

And so it was. Returning to his white room, one day, he sank exhausted into the armchair and said:

"Fancy—on the way to Arca Naturale there's a hut just like the ones at home! And the people in it too—the grandfather, decrepit and sage, sits on the doorstep with his pipe, and the woman, and the dark-eyed lass—a perfect illusion. All but the mountains, the rocks, the sea. Everything else, even the sun, is just the same."

And he began to speak in a low voice of the destiny of his native land, of its future, its people whom he loved so dearly, of its literature and the useful work of the now prohibited *Prosvita*. Listening to him, one realized that he was continually thinking of all this, and that what he knew, he new thoroughly.

In June 1911 he wrote from Krivorivna in the Carpathians:

"I spend my whole time roaming the mountains on a Guzul pony, as light and graceful as a ballet dancer. I have been in wild spots accessible to very few, on the alpine meadows where the Guzul nomads spend the whole summer with their flocks. If you only knew how majestic nature is here, how primitive life is. The Guzuls are a very interesting people, with a wealth of imagination and the most original psychological outlook. Profoundly pagan, the Guzul spends his whole life to the day of his death in the struggle with the evil spirits inhabiting the woods, hills and rivers. Christianity he employed merely for the adornment of the pagan cult. What numbers of beautiful fairy-tales, traditions, beliefs and symbols are to be found here! I am collecting material, enjoying nature, looking, listening, learning."

In his next letter, from Chernigov, he was forced to admit:

"I could not resist climbing the mountains, and of course I have injured my health. But it was so beautiful—and that is the main thing."

While, in his aspirations towards a knowledge of life and its beauty, he did not spare his physical strength, his attitude towards his poetical

talent was extremely austere, and he placed demands upon himself that were too severe. "I have a very strong sense of dissatisfaction with myself," he said to me again and again. "My stories often seem to me insipid, uninteresting, superfluous, I sometimes feel quite guilty towards literature and my readers," he wrote in 1910.

I felt that these thoughts were ever present in his mind, ever nibbling at his anguished heart.

"Do you like my *Samotni?*" he asked.

"It's the best of your three prose-poems, and in my opinion they are all good."

He smiled sadly.

"I read it again this morning, and felt quite embarrassed. Nobody could want it, it could not interest anyone. Why such wails? Everyone is lonely. And why should one write about this curse of ours like that?"

Then, having worked himself up into a rage, he continued:

"At the very end there is a cry of exultation —and that's not sincere, just put in for my own consolation. What is there to exult in? If you're lonely—it means no one needs you."

We often talked about this and he always castigated himself severely.

"Listen to this. It's good":

Sad earth! I feel compassion with your plight,
And yet I know the gloom that shrouds your face
Some day will fade away, and in its place
The sun of liberty will shed its joyous light.

He laughed and turned the lines into comic verse.

Once someone said to him:

"What a true and terrible thing your *Laughter* is."

He waved his hand scornfully.

"It's borrowed. And done unskilfully—in real life that laughter is more terrible and justifiable."

Sometimes it was irritating, but more often painful, to hear these retorts of his—the notes of great and sincere torments could be heard in them.

While ruthless to himself, he was exceedingly indulgent to others, always finding, even in what was not very good, some pointed word or sounding phrase.

"Old man," he said one evening, when the sea and the island were rapt in a strange silence as if in soundless admiration of some marvellous

thing. "I have seen and felt so much, there is a veritable world of images, ideas, songs which are simple and tender to the point of tears, seethes in my soul. If only I could let it fall in torrents like rain on to the earth and the people on it! But I don't know how to do it."

He could not, but he might have, he could have written great, wonderful works. Much had already been thought out by him, much that was in its way beautiful and original. He could not because throughout the three years of our acquaintance the same note sounded with ever-increasing force in every letter.

"I have to admit that there's something wrong with me. My heart is getting worse and worse, sometimes I have to go to bed, writing exhausts me so that I have no strength to take up anything else."

"I have hardly earned anything this winter, which means an insuperable obstacle has been created. And all the time a four-room villa for 65 lire and a kind landlady tempt me with radiant smiles."

At last, on the 9th of October, 1912, he wrote:

"I'm in a bad way, dear A. M., I am constantly ill, continuously and severely. Worst of all,

I cannot work. There remains a desperate remedy—to go to the hospital and stay there for a long time, and so in a few days I shall be off for Kiev."

From Obraztsov's clinic he wrote cheerfully: "At last they've moved me to Kiev and put me in hospital as a severe case of heart. And yet, fancy! Sometimes it seems to me so nice to be ill. Such wonderful people visit me daily, bringing me just what I most love—flowers, books, and themselves. The same sun which warms *you* looks into my window, and this makes it seem still warmer and kinder."

He was fond of bestowing a kind word on people and even when profoundly grieved by the death, the day before, of N. V. Lisenko, an outstanding Ukrainian composer, he found such a word in his heart. . . .

He knew he was soon to die, and spoke of it constantly, simply and without fear, but also without the bravado which many find such false consolation in.

"Death must be conquered, and will be conquered," he said once. "I believe in the victory of reason and will over death, just as I believe that I will soon die myself. And millions more

will die, and yet, in time, death will become a simple act of the will, we will prepare for oblivion just as consciously as we now prepare for sleep. Death will be conquered when the majority of people clearly discern the value of life, realize its beauty, feel the joy of working and being alive."

A man of lofty spiritual culture, with a good knowledge of natural science, he followed attentively all that was being done in the fight against death, but he also felt the poetry of dying, the poetry of the ceaseless changes of form.

Again and again, lifting his eyes gratefully to the grey rocks of Capri, richly clad in luxuriant grass and flowers, he said:

"How great the life force is! We are accustomed to it and do not notice the victory of the living over the dead, the active over the passive, and we seem not to be aware that the sun creates flowers and fruits from inert rock, we do not see how the living, to cheer and rejoice us, triumphs everywhere. We should greet the world with a friendly smile. . . ."

He knew how to smile—a friendly smile for everything.

He wrote to me about the death of Tolstoi:

"I was sorry to read how you suffered over the death of Tolstoi. I suffered too, but—ought I to be ashamed?—I felt glad to know that greatness exists on the earth. Death seems to show proportions better than life."

The death of Mikhail Kotsubinsky was felt by me as a heavy personal loss, I had lost a true friend.

A beautiful, rare blossom had faded, a kindly star had gone out. His was a difficult lot—to be an honest man in Russia is no easy task.

Our times are growing poor in good people—let us yield to the sweet grief of remembering them, the beauty of those bright souls who loved humanity and the world devotedly, the strong ones who knew how to work for the happiness of their native land.

Long live honest people in our memory!

NIKOLAI GARIN-MIKHAILOVSKY

EVERY NOW and then people are born into the world who are what I would call cheerful martyrs.

I do not think Jesus Christ, whom the New Testament makes out a bit of a pedant, can be considered their progenitor; the progenitor of cheerful martyrs is probably Francis of Assisi—great artist in the love of life as he was, he did not love in order to preach love, but simply because, being a past master in the art and joy of ecstatic love, he could not help sharing this joy with others.

It is precisely the joy of love I would emphasize, and not the force of pity, which compelled Jean Henri Dunant to create the international organization known as the Red Cross, and which produced such individuals as the famous Dr. Gaaz,

the practical humanitarian, who lived during the difficult times of Tsar Nikolai I.

But there is no longer any place for pure pity in life, it apparently only exists in our times as a mask for shame.

Cheerful martyrs are not very great people, or perhaps they do not seem to be great because, from the point of view of common sense, they can hardly be discerned against the dark background of harsh social relations. They exist despite common sense; their existence can in no way be justified, but for their will to be what they are.

I have had the luck to come across six cheerful martyrs, of whom the most vivid example was Yakov Teitel, ex-prosecutor of Samara and an unbaptized Jew.

The fact of a Jew being a prosecutor was a source of endless unpleasantness for Teitel, whose Christian superiors in office regarded him as a stain on the white radiance of the law department and did their utmost to turn him out of the position he had held, I think, ever since the "era of great reforms." Teitel, who is still flourishing, has written of his war with the Ministry of Justice in his *Reminiscences*. Yes, he still flourishes, and quite lately his seventieth or eight-

N. G. Garin-Mikhailovsky

1893

ieth birthday was celebrated. But he follows the example of A. Peshekhonov and V. Myakotin, who were always said to make themselves out younger than they really were.

His venerable age does not in the least prevent Teitel from going on with the work to which he has devoted his whole life. Just as in the years 1895 and 1896 in Samara, he continues indefatigably and cheerfully to love his fellow beings and to do his ardent best to help them.

All the liveliest and most interesting people in the town, which was, by the way, not very rich in such people, used to gather in his house daily. Everyone went to see him—from Annenkov, Chairman of the District Court and a descendant of the Decembrists, a clever man and a gentleman, to the Marxist staff of the *Samarsky Vestnik (Samara Herald)* and that of the *Samara Gazette*, hostile to the *Vestnik*, more from rivalry than conviction. There were to be met liberal lawyers and young men with vague occupations but extremely criminal ideas and intentions. It was odd to meet such persons as "free" guests of the prosecutor, the more that they took not the slightest pains to conceal either their ideas or their intentions.

When a newcomer arrived on the scene the hosts did not introduce him to their friends and no one bothered about him, all being perfectly sure that anyone who came to see Yakov Teitel must be all right. Unlimited freedom of speech prevailed. Teitel himself was a fiery polemist and sometimes actually stamped his foot at his interlocutor. His face would turn crimson, his curly grey hair stand on end, his white moustache bristle ferociously, the very buttons on his uniform would stir. But all this frightened nobody, for all the time Yakov Teitel's fine eyes shone with a radiant, affectionate smile.

Yakov Lvovich and Yekaterina Dmitrievna, his wife, were the most hospitable of hosts, and placed on their huge table an immense dish of meat and fried potatoes, of which their guests partook to their heart's content, drinking beer or thick, purplish wine, probably Caucasian, which tasted of manganese and while it left indelible spots on the white tablecloth did not affect one's head.

After supper the guests would fall to verbal battles, which, by the way, often began during the process of satiation, too.

It was in Teitel's house that I made the ac-

quaintance of Nikolai Georgievich Mikhailovsky-Garin.

A man in the uniform of a railway engineer came up to me, looked into my eyes and said with brisk informality:

"You're Gorky, aren't you? You write fairly well. But when it's Khlamida who writes, it's bad. You're Khlamida, too, aren't you?"

I knew myself that Yegudiil Khlamida wrote badly, and grieved over it—perhaps that is why I did not like the engineer. But he continued imperturbably:

"You can't write light articles. For that one needs to be something of a satirist—and you haven't got it in you. You have humour, but it's a bit rough, and you don't use it very skilfully."

It isn't very pleasant to have a stranger suddenly fire off a lot of home truths. You wish he were mistaken, but have to admit that he is right.

He stood close to me, speaking very fast, as if he had a great deal to say and was afraid he wouldn't have time to get it all out. He was shorter than me and I had a good view of his thin face, with the well-kept beard, the fine

brow beneath greying hair, and the remarkably youthful eyes. I could not quite make out their expression, it seemed to be friendly, but was at the same time defiant and derisive.

"Don't you like what I say?" he asked, and, as if to confirm his right to say unpleasant things to me, he named himself: "I'm Garin. Read anything of mine?"

I had read his sceptical *Sketches of the Modern Village* in *Russkaya Mysl* (*Russian Thought*), and had heard a few amusing stories about the author's life among the peasants. I had greatly enjoyed the *Sketches*, which had been severely criticized by Narodnik reviewers, and what I had heard about Garin showed that he had the gift of imagination. "My *Sketches* are not art, they're not even fiction," he said, the abstracted gaze of his youthful-looking eyes showing that his thoughts were elsewhere.

I asked him if it were true that he had once sown forty dessiatines with poppy seed.

"Why precisely forty?" Nikolai Georgievich seemed to be annoyed, and began counting in a preoccupied manner, his fine brows knitted:

"Forty sins cancelled if you kill one spider, forty times forty churches in Moscow, a woman

not allowed in the church for forty days after childbirth, service for the dead lasts forty days, the fortieth bear is the most dangerous. What the devil does this chatter of forties come from? What d'you think about it?"

But apparently he was not much interested to know what I thought, for he immediately said with admiration, patting my shoulder with his small, vigorous hand:

"You should have seen those poppies in blossom, old man!"

He then darted away from me and plunged into the verbal battle being waged around the table.

This meeting did not make me feel any liking for N. G., in whom I sensed something artificial. Why had he started running through all those forties? And it took me some time to get used to his aristocratic elegance and "democratism," which at first struck me as put on for effect.

He was slender, good-looking, and moved rapidly but gracefully, giving the impression that this rapidity came, not from jangled nerves, but from a superfluity of energy. He seemed to speak negligently, but in reality his phrases were constructed with skill and originality. He

was a master of the introductory clause, so detested by A. P. Chekhov. But I never remarked in N. G. the advocate's habit of admiring his own eloquence. In his speech there was always "small room for words, much space for thought."

He probably made an impression, on first acquaintance, not altogether in his own favour. The playwright Kosorotov complained of him:

"I wanted to talk to him about literature, but he treated me to a lecture on the culture of edible roots, and then started talking about ergot."

And Leonid Andreyev answered the question —how do you like Garin?—as follows:

"Very nice, clever, very interesting. But he's an engineer. It's bad, Alexei, when a man's an engineer. I'm afraid of engineers—they're dangerous fellows. Before you know where you are they fix an extra wheel to you, and off you go on unknown rails. That Garin has a way of getting people on to his own rails—he's very persistent and aggressive."

Nikolai Georgievich built the railway line from Samara to the Sergiyevsk sulphur springs, and had any amount of stories about his work there.

Requiring an engine of special construction, he sent a statement to the Ministry for Communications on the necessity for purchasing one in Germany. But either the Minister for Communications or Witte forbade the purchase, and suggested ordering an engine at Sormovo or the Kolomna works. I cannot now remember the complex and audacious wiles by which Garin managed to buy the engine in Germany, after all, and smuggled it to Samara. No doubt this saved several thousand rubles and several weeks, still more precious than money.

It was not, however, of the economy of time and money that he boasted with such youthful enthusiasm, but of his having managed to smuggle it to Samara.

"That was an achievement!" he exclaimed. Wasn't it, now?"

Apparently the achievement was accomplished not so much in the interests of business, as in the desire to overcome the obstacles placed in his way, or, still simpler—to play a practical joke on the government. Like every talented Russian, there was a certain streak of mischief in N. G.

Even his benevolence was typically Russian. He threw his money about as if it were a burden

to him, and as if the rainbow-coloured scraps of paper, for which people exchanged their strength, disgusted him. His first wife was a rich woman, as far as I remember, the daughter of General Cherevin, a close friend of Alexander III. But he expended her millions in a very short time on agricultural experiments, and in the years 1895 and 1896 was living on his earnings. He did things on the grand scale, treating his friends to delicious lunches and dinners and expensive wines. He ate and drank so little himself that it was hard to understand what his indefatigable energy was nourished on. He was fond of giving presents and making people happy, but not in order to win their liking, he could do this easily enough by the charm of his talents and dynamic energy. For him life was a holiday, and he unconsciously did all he could to make those around him share this attitude.

I was an involuntary participator in one of his practical jokes, myself. It was on a Sunday morning in the office of the *Samara Gazette*, where I was sitting admiring my own article, which had been trampled on by the censor like a field of oats by a horse. The doorman, still perfectly sober, came in.

"There's someone to see you. He says he has brought you some clocks from Syzran."

I had not been in Syzran, or bought any clocks, and I told the doorman so.

He went out, mumbled something at the door, and came back again.

"The Jew says he's brought you some clocks."

"Show him in."

A little old Jew in a shabby coat and queer-shaped hat came in, cast a mistrustful glance at me, and placed on the table before me a slip of paper torn from a calendar, on which was written, in Garin's illegible handwriting, "Peshkov-Gorky" and something else that was impossible to make out.

"Did Engineer Garin give you this?"

"How do I know? I don't ask my customers their names," said the old man.

"Show me the clocks," I said, holding out my hand.

But he only started back and asked, looking at me as if he thought I were drunk:

"Perhaps there's another Peshkov-Gorky!"

"No, there isn't. Give me the clocks, and go."

"All right, all right," said the Jew, and went out, shrugging his shoulders, without, however,

giving me any clocks. A minute later the doorman and a drayman carried in a big crate, obviously not at all heavy, and put it down on the floor, while the old man said:

"Sign the receipt."

"What's this?" I asked, pointing to the crate.

"I told you—clocks," replied the Jew indifferently.

"Is it a grandfather clock?"

"Clocks—ten clocks."

"Ten clocks?"

"That's what I said."

It was all very funny, but I was angry, for not all Jewish anecdotes are good, especially when you don't see the point, or when you find yourself playing an absurd role in them. I asked the old man what it all meant.

"Think what you're saying! People don't go from Samara to Syzran to buy clocks, do they?"

But the old Jew was angry now.

"It's not my business to think," he said. "I was told—do this. And I did it. The *Samara Gazette*? Quite right. Peshkov-Gorky? That's right, too. You sign the receipt. What more do you want of me?"

I wanted nothing more of him. The old man obviously thought he was being dragged into some shady business, his hands shook, and he fidgeted with the brim of his hat. The way he looked at me made me feel as if I had done him wrong in some way or other. I dismissed him and told the doorman to take the crate into the proofroom.

Four or five days later Nikolai Georgievich, dusty, weary, but cheerful, turned up. His engineer's tunic fitted him like a skin.

"Was it you who sent me those clocks?" I asked.

"Oh, yes! So I did! What of it?"

And he questioned me in his turn, with a glance of curiosity at my face:

"What d'you intend to do with them? I haven't the slightest use for them myself."

Then he told me the following story: walking about the little town of Syzran on the bank of the Volga, at sunset, Nikolai Georgievich Garin-Mikhailovsky had come upon a Jewish boy, fishing.

"And he had no luck at all, you know, old man. The minnows bit greedily, but two out of every three got away. What was wrong? It turned out he was fishing not with a hook, but with a brass pin."

The child was, of course, remarkably beautiful and intelligent. Though far from naive, and not particularly kind-hearted, Garin was always coming across "remarkably intelligent" individuals. One sees what one really wants to see.

"And already acquainted with the sorrows of life," he continued. "He lived with his grandfather, a watchmaker, and was learning the trade—he was eleven years old. He and his grandfather, it appeared, were the only Jews in the town. And so on, and so on. I went with him to his grandfather's. A wretched little shop, the old man repaired the burners of lamps and cleaned the taps of samovars. Dust, dirt, poverty. I occasionally get a fit of—sentimentality. Offer them money? Awkward. So I bought his whole stock, and gave the money to the kid. I sent him some books yesterday."

And N. G. added with perfect gravity:

"If you don't know what to do with the clocks I can send for them. They can be given to the workers on the branch line."

All this he said, as usual, in a great hurry, but he was a little embarrassed, and seemed to be dismissing what he said with a brief abrupt gesture of his right hand.

He sometimes had short stories in the *Samara Gazette*. One of these—*The Genius*—was the true story of the Jew Liberman, who had thought out the differential calculus for himself. A semi-literate, consumptive Jew, operating with figures for twelve years, he had actually discovered the differential calculus, but learning that this had been done long before him, he died of grief and a haemorrhage of the lungs on the station platform at Samara.

It was not very well written, but N. G. told the story of Liberman in the editor's office with remarkable dramatic effect. He was a splendid narrator, and very often spoke much better than he wrote. He worked in conditions utterly unsuitable for a writer and it was a wonder that, leading the nomad life he did, he was able to write stories like *The Childhood of Tyoma*, *Schoolboys*, *Students*, *Clotilda*, and *Granny*.

When the *Samara Gazette* asked him to write the story of the mathematician Liberman he said, after prolonged consideration, that he would write it in the train on the way to somewhere in the Urals. The beginning of the story, written on telegraph forms, was brought to the paper by an *izvozchik* from the station at Samara.

That night a very long telegram containing corrections for the beginning of the story was received, and a day or two later, another telegram: "Do not print work sent, will do new version." But he never sent another version, and the end of the story came from Ekaterinburg, I think.

His writing was so illegible that the manuscript required deciphering, and this, of course, altered the story a little. The manuscript was then recopied in a way accessible to the mind of the printer. Naturally enough N. G. read his story in the paper with a wrinkled brow, exclaiming:

"What the devil made me write this?"

Of the story *Granny* he told me:

"It was written in a single night, at a posting station. There were some traders drinking there, chattering like a flock of geese, and I sat and wrote."

I saw the rough drafts of his book on Manchuria and *Korean Fairy-Tales*, a bundle of all sorts of bits of paper—forms headed "Service Department of Rolling Stock and Traffic," ruled pages torn from an office ledger, a concert bill, and even two Chinese visiting cards, all scribbled over with unfinished words, mere hints at letters.

"How can you read all this?"

"Quite simple!" he replied. "It's my own writing."

And he began reading one of the charming Korean stories with the greatest of ease. But it seemed to me that he was not so much reading from the manuscript, as saying it "by heart."

I think his attitude to himself as a writer was sceptical and unfair. Someone praised *The Childhood of Tyoma* in his presence.

"A trifle," he said, sighing. "Everyone writes well about children, it's hard to write badly about them."

And he changed the subject as he always did in such cases.

"But artists find children very difficult to paint—they always come out like dolls. Even Van Dyck's 'Infanta' is a doll."

S. S. Gusev, the gifted essayist, reproached him:

"It's too bad you write so little."

"It must be because I'm more of an engineer than a writer," he said with a rueful chuckle. "And engineering isn't my true vocation, either—I ought to be building vertically, not horizontally. I ought to have gone in for architecture."

And yet he would speak of his work on the railway with enormous enthusiasm, like a poet.

He talked just as well and enthusiastically of the subjects for his stories. I can remember two—on a steamer between Nizhni-Novgorod and Kazan he told me he wanted to write a long novel on the basis of the legend of Ching Chiu-tung, the Chinese devil who wanted to do good to people. This legend had already been used once in Russian literature, by the Russian writer Rafail Zotov. Garin's hero, a good manufacturer, very rich, who was bored with life, also desired to do people good. A kindly dreamer, he fancied himself another Robert Owen, did a great many absurd things and, hounded by practical individuals, died in the frame of mind of Timon of Athens.

Another time, sitting with me one night in Petersburg, he told me a fascinating story he wanted to write.

"Three pages—not more!"

As far as I remember, the plot was as follows: a forester, a man whose thoughts are all turned inward, oppressed by his solitary life and regarding all men as beasts of prey, is returning to his hut at night. He overtakes a tramp, and they

proceed on their way together. The cautious, languid conversation of mutually suspicious persons. Thunder in the air, tension in nature, a wind bearing down upon the earth, the trees hiding behind one another, a sinister rustling. Suddenly the forester has a feeling that the tramp is tempted to murder him. He tries to walk behind his companion, who, however, obviously not desiring this, strides on at his side. They fall silent. And the forester tells himself that whatever he does, the tramp will murder him—it is his fate. They arrive at the hut, the forester gives the tramp a meal, of which he also partakes, says a prayer and goes to bed, leaving on the table the knife with which he had cut the loaf, and even examining the gun propped against the corner by the stove, before lying down. The thunder rumbles eerily in the forest, and the lightning is more terrifying than ever. Rain comes down in torrents, the hut shakes as if it had been torn away from its foundations and were floating. The tramp looks at the knife, the gun, gets up and puts on his cap.

"Where are you off to?" asks the forester.

"I'm off! To hell with you!"

"Why?"

"You want to kill me, I know you do."

The forester seizes him.

"That'll do, mate. Why, I thought you wanted to kill me! Don't go!"

"I'm going. Since we both thought about it, it means one of us must die."

And the tramp goes out. The forester, alone again, sits on his bench and sheds a man's difficult tears.

After a moment's pause, Garin asked:

"Perhaps I shouldn't make him cry. But he told me: 'I wept bitterly.' 'What about?' I asked him. 'I don't know, Nikolai Georgievich,' he said. 'I just felt sad.' Perhaps I should let the tramp stay, and say: 'See what kind of folk we are, mate,' or something of the sort. Or perhaps they should both just turn over and go to sleep."

It was clear that this subject moved him greatly and that he was keenly aware of its sombre depths. He related it in very low tones, almost in a whisper, speaking rapidly. He made me feel as if he saw distinctly the forester, the tramp, the blue flash of the lightning among the branches of the black trees, as if he heard the thunder and the wailing of the wind, and the rustlings. And

it seemed strange that this refined man, with his subtle face and feminine hands, always gay and energetic, should secrete within him such gloomy subjects. It was not like him—the prevailing tone of his work was light and festive. N. G. Garin smiled at people, regarded himself as a worker whom the world needed, and possessed the cheerful, disarming assurance of a man who knows he will always get his own way. I met him quite often, although always fleetingly, for he was always hurrying off somewhere. I can only remember him in good spirits, never pensive, tired or preoccupied.

Of literature, however, he almost always spoke irresolutely, with an embarrassed look, in a low voice. And when I asked him, a long time after our talk: "Have you done the story of the forester?" he replied: "No. It's not my subject. It's more for Chekhov, it needs his poetical humour."

I think he considered himself a Marxist simply because he was an engineer. He was attracted by the energy of Marx's doctrines, but when the determinism of the Marxist philosophy of economics was mentioned in his hearing—at one

time it was fashionable to talk about it—Garin would argue passionately against it, just as passionately as he later argued against the maxim of E. Bernstein: "The movement is everything, the final aim is nothing."

"That's decadence!" he would cry. "You can't go on for ever building roads over the earth."

Marx's plan for the reorganization of the world delighted him by its breadth, he conceived of a future of colossal collective labours, carried out by the whole of humanity freed from the fetters of class government.

He was a poet by nature, this could be felt whenever he spoke of anything he loved, of anything he believed in. But he was the poet of labour, the man with a definite leaning to the practical, to action. He often let fall statements of extreme originality and audacity. He was, for instance, convinced that syphilis could be cured by the injection of typhoid germs, and declared that he had known several cases of syphilis disappearing after an attack of typhus. He even wrote about this—one of the characters of his book *Students* was cured of syphilis in precisely this manner. Here he almost showed himself to be a prophet, for creeping paralysis is now

already being cured by plasmodium injections from various fevers, and medical scientists are beginning ever more frequently to speak of the power of "para-therapy."

Garin was fond of talking about the "breeding of parasites," but if I am not mistaken a parasite which killed the potato bug had already been discovered in the United States, and was being made use of.

Garin was gifted in the all-round Russian way, and, also in the Russian way, flung his energy about indiscriminately. It was, however, always interesting to hear him speak of the protection of the plants from pests, or wax eloquent on ways for preventing rot of railway sleepers, on babbitt, pneumatic brakes, and so on.

Savva Mamontov, the builder of the Northern Railway line, once said to me on a visit to the Island of Capri after the death of Garin:

"He was talented—an all-round talent. He even wore his engineer's tunic like a talented man."

And Mamontov could discern talent, he had spent his whole life among talented men, such as Fyodor Shalyapin, Vrubel, Victor Vasnetsov, and many more whom he had set on their feet, and he was himself exceptionally, enviably talented.

On his return from Manchuria and Korea, Garin was invited to the Anichkov Palace, to the tsaritsa. Nikolai II wished to hear the story of his travels.

"Why, they're just provincials!" said Garin, shrugging his shoulders in amazement after his reception at Court.

This is how he described his visit to the Court:

"I will not attempt to conceal that I braced myself up to go there, and even felt a bit shy. To meet the emperor of a hundred and thirty million persons—that's no ordinary acquaintance. I couldn't help thinking that such a man must be in some way significant, imposing. And there was a nice infantry officer sitting and smoking, smiling kindly, every now and then putting a question, but never about things that ought to interest a tsar under whose reign the great Siberian railway had been built. After all Russia stretches out to the Pacific coast, where she is met by anything but friends and in anything but a cordial manner. Perhaps it was naive of me to think so—the tsar shouldn't talk about things like that to a nobody. But then, why invite me to come and see him? And since he had invited me, why not take it seriously, why ask: 'Do the

Koreans like us?' What could I say? I answered with a question, and not a very tactful one: 'Whom are you speaking of?' I forgot that I had been warned not to ask any questions, only to answer them. But how could I help asking questions when his were so silly? It was boring, and the ladies did not speak at all. The old tsaritsa raised first one eyebrow, then the other, in her astonishment. Beside her sat the young one, like a companion, in a rigid pose, her eyes like stones, an injured expression on her face. She reminded me of a spinster who, having got to the age of thirty-four, was annoyed with nature for having imposed the duty of bearing children on women, while she had never had any children, or even the most trifling love-affair. And her likeness to the tsaritsa somehow upset me, too, made me shy. Altogether it was very boring."

This, too, he said in a hurried manner, as if vexed at having to speak of such an uninteresting thing.

A few days later he was officially informed that the tsar had awarded him an order—Vladimir I think it was—but he never got it, for soon after he was sent out of Petersburg for having

signed, with other writers, a protest against the attacks on students and others who had taken part in the demonstrations in front of the Kazan Cathedral.

His friends chaffed him: "Your order has slipped through your fingers, Nikolai Georgievich."

"To hell with them!" he exclaimed indignantly. "I have important work to do and now I'm to be sent away. How idiotic! We don't like you, so you can't live and work in our town! I shall be just the same as I am now in another town, shan't I?"

A few minutes later he was talking about the necessity for planting forests in the Samara Gubernia, so as to check the advance of sand from the east.

His head was always full of extensive projects and his most frequent exclamation probably was: "One must struggle."

There had to be a struggle against the Volga becoming shallow, the popularity in the provinces of *Birzheviye Vedomosti* (*Stock Exchange News*), the extension of gullies, in a word—struggle.

"And against the autocracy," prompted the

worker Petrov, the follower of Gapon, to which N. G. replied with a question:

"Are you discontented because your foe is stupid? Would you like a clever, stronger one?"

The blind Shelgunov, an old revolutionary, and one of the first workers to become a Social-Democrat, inquired:

"Who said that? Very well put!"

It was in Kuokkala in the summer of 1905. N. G. Garin had brought me fifteen—or it may have been twenty-five—thousand rubles to hand over to L. B. Krasin for the Party funds, and found himself in a society which was, to put it mildly, extremely mixed. In one room of the summer cottage P. M. Rutenberg conferred with two as yet unexposed provocateurs—Yevno Azef and Tatarov. In another, the Menshevik Saltykov conversed with V. L. Benois about applying the transportation technique of *Osvobozhdeniye (Liberation)* to the Petersburg committee and, if I am not mistaken, the as yet unexposed Nikolai Zolotiye Ochki was also present. My neighbour in the country, the pianist Osip Gabrilovich, strolled about the garden with the painter I. Y. Repin. Petrov,

Shelgunov and Garin were sitting on the steps of the verandah. Garin, as usual, was in a hurry, glancing at his watch, and he and Shelgunov were trying to shake Petrov's faith in Gapon. Garin then came to me in my room, the door of which looked out on the gate of the house.

From there we watched the burly, thick-lipped, pig-eyed Azef, in his dark blue suit, and the well-fed, long-haired Tatarov, who looked like a cathedral deacon in disguise, as they passed on their way to the station, followed by the gloomy, lanky Saltykov and the modest Benois. I remember Rutenberg winking at his provocateurs, and boasting to me:

"Our lot are more respectable."

"What a lot of people you have here!" said Garin, sighing. "You do have an interesting life!"

"It's not for you to envy me."

"Me? I rush about all over the place as if I were the devil's own coachman, and life passes, I'll be sixty soon, and what have I done?"

"*The Childhood of Tyoma, Schoolboys, Students, Engineers*—a veritable epos."

"You're very kind," he laughed. "But you know very well that it wouldn't have mattered if none of these books had been written."

"You evidently couldn't help writing."

"Oh, yes, I could have! And altogether, these are no times for books. . . ."

I think this was the first time I saw him tired and a bit out of sorts, but this was because he was not well, he had a temperature.

"They'll be arresting you soon, old man," he said suddenly. "I have a foreboding. And they'll be burying me—that's a foreboding, too."

But a few minutes later, over tea, he was himself again, and said:

"Russia is the happiest of countries. What a lot of interesting work there is to do here, how many marvellous potentialities, complex tasks there are! I've never envied anyone, but I do envy the people of the future, those who will live thirty-forty years after me. Well—good-bye. I'm off!"

This was our last meeting. He died "on the run," as he had lived. He was taking part in some conference about literary affairs, and after making an ardent speech, went into the next room and lay down on the sofa, and paralysis of the heart put an end to the life of this talented, inexhaustibly energetic man.

MIKHAIL PRISHVIN

IT IS NOT EASY to write about you, Mikhail Mikhailovich, for one should be able to write with a skill as great as your own, and that, I know, is not possible for me.

Besides, there's something a bit awkward in M. Gorky writing a sort of explanatory article for the works of M. Prishvin, an original artist who has been doing splendid work in Russian literature for the past twenty-five years. I would seem to be imputing to your readers ignorance, inability to understand.

Again I feel a certain diffidence in writing because, although I began my work earlier than you, I have nevertheless, as an attentive reader, learned much from your books. Do not think I say this from politeness, or false modesty. It is the truth—I have learned. I am still learning,

and not only from you, who are a finished master, but even from writers thirty-five years younger than myself, from those who have only just begun to write, whose talent is not yet in harmony with their ability, but whose voice rings out strong, fresh, new.

I learn not simply because "it's never too late to learn," but also because it is natural and pleasing to man to learn. And, above all, of course, because an artist can only learn his skill from another artist.

I began learning from you, Mikhail Mikhailovich, from the time of *The Black Arab*, *Kolobok*, *The Region of the Unfrightened Birds*, and many more of your stories. I was attracted by the purity of your language, and by the perfection with which you convey, with flexible combinations of simple words, the almost physical sensation of all that you write about. Not many of our writers possess this power to such an extent as you do.

But on re-reading your books I find in them yet another and still more important quality which is exclusively your own; I have not found it in the works of any other Russian writer.

There have been, and still are, many among

us who can paint landscape charmingly in words. One has only to remember I. S. Turgenev, Aksakov's *Notes of a Hunter*, and the marvellous word-pictures of Lev Tolstoi. A. P. Chekhov seems to have embroidered his *Steppe* in coloured beads. Sergeyev-Tsensky, describing the Crimean landscape, seems to be a Chopin performing on a reed pipe. And there is much more that is skilful, moving, and even powerful in the descriptions of nature by our word-artists.

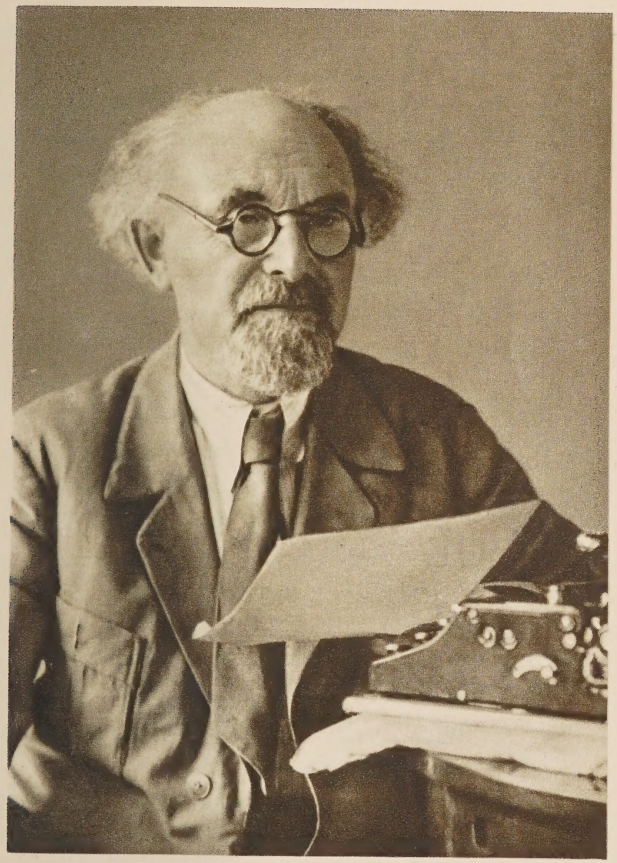
For a long time I admired these lyrical hymns to nature, but with the years they began to arouse in me a feeling of astonishment, and even protest. I began to feel that beneath the enchanting language used for speaking of the "beauties of nature" was concealed an unconscious attempt to charm away Leviathan, that terrible, obtuse creature which spawns senselessly and voluminously and as senselessly devours its spawn. There is in this something like the abasement of man when confronted by certain enigmas he has not yet solved. There is something "barbaric and atavistic" in the kowtowing of man to the beauty of nature—a beauty which he himself, by virtue of his imagination, introduces into it.

After all there is no beauty in the desert, the beauty is in the soul of an Arab. And there is no beauty in the grim scenery of Finland—it was a Finn who invented it and bestowed it upon his austere country. Someone has said: "Levitan discovered a beauty in Russian scenery which no one before him had seen." And nobody could have, because it was not there, and Levitan did not "discover" it, it was his human gift to Earth. Before him Jacob Ruisdael, Claude Lorraine and scores of other great wielders of the brush showered the gift of beauty plentifully upon the earth. Scientists, too, such as Humboldt, the author of *Kosmos,* have generously adorned the earth. The materialist Haeckel elected to find "beauty of form" in the hideous tangle of waterweeds and in jellyfish—found it, and almost convinced us that they really are beautiful. And yet the ancient Hellenes, the most refined connoisseurs of beauty, considered the jellyfish a nauseating creature. Man has learned to speak of the wild moans and wails of the blizzard, of the elemental dance of the disastrous sea waves, of earthquakes and of hurricanes, in exquisite dulcet words. And all glory and praise to man for this, for it is his own will-

power, his imagination which is continually converting the barren fragment of the Cosmos into a dwelling place for himself, making the Earth ever more convenient for himself, and endeavouring to capture within his mind all its secret forces.

And you see, Mikhail Mikhailovich, in *your* books I do not see man kowtowing to nature. As a matter of fact I do not feel that you write about nature, but about something that is greater than nature—the Earth, our Great Mother. I have never come across, never felt, in the works of any other Russian writer, such a harmonious blend of love for the earth and knowledge of it, as I see and feel in yours.

You have a perfect knowledge of forest and swamp, fish and bird, herbs and beasts, dogs and insects—the world as conceived by you is extraordinarily rich and wide. And still more remarkable is the abundance of simple, bright words in which you embody your love for the earth and all that lives on it, for the whole "biosphere." In *The Boots* you write: "There is nothing more difficult than to speak of what is good," but I think that is only because—as you say in that same story—"One would like to



M. M. PRISHVIN

1945

make the power of the word as strong as physical sensation."

In *Berendei's Springs* I see you as a kind of handsome lad, a suitor, and your words of the "earth's secrets" ring in my ears like the words of a man of the future, the sovereign of the Earth, the creator of its miracles and joys. And it is this quite original feature which I find in your writing and which seems to me new and infinitely important.

People usually say to the Earth:

"We are Thine."

You say to her:

"Thou art Mine."

And this is true. The Earth belongs to us a great deal more than we are accustomed to think it does. The great Russian scientist Vernadsky firmly and ably established a new hypothesis, proving that the fertile soil on the rocky and metallic surface of our planet is composed of organic elements coming from living matter. This matter, in the course of an incalculable period of time, eroded and destroyed the hard, barren crust of the planet, just as, to this day, stonecrop and certain other plants destroy minerals. Plants and bacteria have not merely disin-

tegrated the hard crust of the earth, the very atmosphere we live in and breathe has been created by them. Oxygen is the product of plant activity. The fertile soil from which we obtain bread is formed by innumerable bodies of dead insects, birds and animals, by the leaves of trees and the petals of flowers. Millions upon millions of human beings have enriched the Earth with their flesh—the Earth is in very truth ours.

And it is this sensation of the Earth as part of our own flesh which rings so clearly in my ears through the pages of your books, oh, Mate and Son of the Great Mother!

This may sound like incest. But it is true—man born by the Earth fertilizes it by his labours and enriches it by the beauty of his imagination.

The universe? Cosmologists, astronomers, astro-physicists, all busy themselves with skill and ardour over the perfection of the universe. The perfection of the Earth is still nearer and more important to the mind and heart of the artist. Cosmic disasters are not so important as social upheavals. Our Earth does not become paler or darker because somewhere in the depths of the Milky Way a sun we know nothing about is

extinguished. The sun will blaze out again but there will never be another Pushkin.

The secrets of the Cosmos are not so interesting and important as the marvellous riddle—by what miracle does inorganic matter become organic matter, and organic matter, developing in human beings, produce for us Lomonosovs and Pushkins, Mendeleyevs and Tolstois, Pasteurs, Marconis, and thousands of great thinkers and poets, human beings who work on the creation of a second nature, the result of our human thought, our will.

Your books, Mikhail Mikhailovich, clearly show that you feel friendly towards human beings. There are not many artists of whom that may be so unhesitatingly and unqualifiedly said as of yourself. Your feeling for human beings arises with logical simplicity from your love for the Earth, from your "geo-philism," your "geo-optimism." It sometimes seems as if you stand one degree higher than the rest of mankind, without, however, the slightest detriment to their dignity. This is fully justified by your keen-sighted, cordial friendship for human beings, whatever they are like, whether wicked from necessity or good from weakness, torturers

from hatred to torture, or victims from the habit of submitting to facts. Your human beings are of the Earth, and on good terms with the Earth. They are more geologically and biologically inclined than those of other writers, they are the most legitimate sons of the Great Mother, truly living particles of the "sacred body of humanity." You remember, always and so profoundly, mankind's painful and miraculous progress from the era of the flint axe to that of the aeroplane.

But what I admire chiefly is that you know how to measure and evaluate human beings by what is good in them, and not by what is bad. This simple wisdom is attained by most people with great difficulty, if at all. We do not wish to understand that the good in man is the most wonderful of all the miracles ever performed by him. After all, human beings really have no reason to be "good," kindness and humanity are not encouraged in them either by the laws of nature, or by the conditions of social existence. And yet you and I know a great many truly good people. What has made them good? Nothing but their own desire. I can see no other motive—human beings desire to be better than they are,

and this they achieve. What is more splendid and marvellous on the Earth than this most complex being, filled, it is true, with inner conflicts, but cultivating within himself the terrible power of imagination and the diabolical ability to laugh at himself. I have learned to observe and think about human beings from many people, and it seems to me that my acquaintance with you, as an artist, has also taught me to do this—how, I am unable to say—but better than I used to.

And Russians in particular, after all they have gone through, and in the light of all they are still going through today, deserve to be regarded from a different, a higher point of view, with greater attention and respect. Of course, I know very well that they are still far from being angels, I don't even want them to be, all I want is to see them workers in love with their work and aware of its enormous significance.

For all of us who are endeavouring to create a new life it is of the utmost importance that we should feel particularly near and akin to one another. The harshness of the times we are living in, the vastness of the work we have undertaken, demand this. If you are a writer—write you must!

No doubt I am mistaken about some things and have exaggerated others. But if so, it has been perfectly conscious on my part for, as everyone knows, I am a thinking person, and in some ways arrogant. I think there is no harm in being mistaken in the way I am mistaken, for my mistakes arise not from a desire to console myself or others with noble lies, but from a conviction that my mistakes are on the side of that truth which will inevitably come into existence, which is alone needed for people, and in which they are bound, as men of the Earth, to find inspiration.

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